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No deal yet
PALESTINIAN and Israeli negotiators yesterday made significant progress in talks on the long delayed redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank town of Hebron, but failed to seal an agreement.

Saeed Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, said wide gaps remained surrounding Israel's demand for the right of hot pursuit of suspects in Palestinian areas. Other still-controversial issues dealt with the type of weapons to be carried by Palestinian police and the opening of a central street in Hebron which is to be used by Jewish settlers.

Israeli army radio said that Israel had rejected a key Palestinian demand for a specific timetable on further withdrawals in the West Bank. It said that Israel wants a written commitment from Palestinian President Yasser Arafat confirming that Palestinians wanted for attacking Israelis would be extradited.

Ghali vote

THE FIRST test of United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali's hopes for re-election to a second term and repeated US threats to block him could come as early as next Monday, Security Council sources said. Private consultations were held on Tuesday between all 15 council members to discuss election procedures. Egypt, Botswana and Guinea-Bissau, the council's three African members, were expected to submit a resolution recommending Ghali's nomination to the General Assembly.

No set schedule has been set for the vote on the new secretary-general, but it is expected to take place during further consultations on Monday. Ghali is the only candidate so far. Diplomats are trying to forge a compromise between the US, which is insisting on a new leadership, and a host of countries including Egypt, France, China, Russia and numerous African and Arab nations which support Ghali's re-election.

Papal plea

APPEALING directly to international policy-makers, Pope John Paul II officiated over the opening of the World Food Summit yesterday by insisting that the imbalance between rich and poor cannot be tolerated, reports Mustafa Abdallah from Rome.

Introducing the plight of the poor to the world leaders assembled in the Italian capital, the pontiff warned that something must be done to alleviate the suffering of the 800 million people in developing countries who do not have adequate access to food. "We have to jointly seek solutions so that never again will there be hungry people living side by side with people in opulence; very poor people next to the very rich; people who lack the basic necessities next to others who waste greatly," the pontiff told delegates from 194 nations gathered at the main hall of the Rome-based UN Food and Agricultural Organisation.

The Pope also denounced sanctions "that are imposed without sufficient consideration." His denouncement came less than 24 hours after the UN General Assembly voted 338-3, the vote with the biggest ever recorded margin, to urge the United States to end its 34-year embargo against Cuba. But it was the refugee crisis in Zaire dominated deliberations at the FAO conference. (see p.6)

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Integration in the balance

Although Israel's economic integration into the region still seems to be on ice, for many businessmen it was business as usual at MENA III

The official Arab message to Israel at the 3rd Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA III) was that its economic integration in the region will be delayed until a true peace has been achieved. "As long as comprehensive peace, on all tracks is not firmly and irreversibly established among us, we will not reap the full benefits of our economic integration," President Hosni Mubarak warned in his opening address to the conference.

The intransigent policies of right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, including the closure of the West Bank and Gaza and foot-dragging on a Hebron troop deployment deal, resulted in many Palestinian businessmen staying away from the conference. Some Arab businessmen said they were more concerned with inter-Arab cooperation, while others maintained that politics was not their business — they were in Cairo to do business with whomever they could.

A strong private sector representation made the Cairo gathering more business-oriented than its predecessors in Amman and Casablanca. MENA III hosted 2,600 business participants from 87 countries and 52 business organisations.

"Promoting national interests" was everybody's concern. Egyptian Minister of Economy Nawal El-Tatawi said MENA III was Egypt's chance to showcase its economic progress and increasingly investment-friendly environment. "The high level of participation alone is a sign of its success," she commented.

Minister of Public Sector Atef Ebeid observed that the "size of the gathering and the smiling faces of participants show how optimistic the group is about Egypt." Although he did not expect many deals to be closed during the three-day MENA III itself, he said that businessmen were by now initiating match-making. "They came here meaning business," he said.

The Egyptian delegation had "detailed investment opportunities and economic reform" to foreign investors, according to Minister of Finance Mohamed El-Gharib, who believes that delegates' enthusiasm was a demonstration of their confidence in the Egyptian economy.

Israel, meanwhile, seems to have been somewhat left out in the cold. Although some delegates noted the continuation of Arab-Israeli business deals, other Arab businessmen emphasised that inter-Arab deals were their priority.

'Justice should prevail'

businessmen emphasised that inter-Arab deals were their priority.

"Most projects at the Cairo conference were Egyptian-Arab or Egyptian-Egyptian, oriented towards the development of Egypt," said Mohamed Farid Khamis, head of the Egyptian Federation of Industries. Prominent Egyptian businessman Ahmed Bahgat thought that the increased political tension in the region should spawn greater inter-Arab trade.

Mohamed Shafiq Gabr, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, said that regional economic conferences need "strong movement on the peace process". Peace must move fast so as to create an environment in which businessmen can conclude business deals, said Gabr.

According to Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian minister of planning, the Palestinian delegation to the Cairo conference was "very, very angry". The Palestinian National Authority was represented by a small official delegation made up of four ministers and not more than 15 businessmen. Many businessmen boycotted the conference to protest Israel's failure to implement the signed accords. PNA Minister of Economy Maher Al-Masri stressed that free trade with the Israelis and the closure of the Palestinian territories were incompatible. "Israel does not allow Palestinians to export anything," said Shaath. "The closure has completely crippled our economy."

Talking to Israelis was not a problem, Sitash noted.

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa said yesterday that regional cooperation hinges on Israel honouring its commitments under previously-concluded agreements. Declaring that talks over the future of Hebron had cast a shadow over the conference, Moussa told reporters: "If Israel insists on its negative position, the chances of cooperation will regrettably be wasted."

Addressing a business lunch afterwards, Moussa said the lesson to be drawn from MENA III was that the Middle East stands to face a major loss if the peace process is forced to retreat. Investors are looking for political stability and this cannot be achieved except by realising a comprehensive peace throughout the region. "In Egypt we believe that justice should prevail and frustration and suppression should end or else there can be no cooperation between peoples," he added.

"But what is important is succeeding in putting pressure on Israel." He added that the Arabs should make Israel understand that it cannot reap the benefits of peace without fulfilling its side of the bargain. He insisted that "there will be no deals" between Arabs and Israelis unless Israel meets its commitments.

The Israeli delegation came with every intention of adopting a low-profile approach. Some Israeli ministers, including Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan and Minister of National Infrastructure Ariel Sharon stayed at home. Some even considered not attending for fear of being ignored after the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce (EFCC) urged its members to isolate Israel. The federation, in fact, refused to attend the conference as an institution because Israel was invited. EFCC head Mahmoud El-Arabi declared that "as long as there is no tangible progress in the peace process, there will be no commercial cooperation between the federation and Israel." One Egyptian businessman commented: "The Israelis don't deserve to cooperate with the Arab private sector yet."

The snub, however, did not discourage the Israeli private sector, and left the likes of Dan Proper, chairman of the Federation of the Israeli Economic Organisations, enthusiastic on the business level. He noted that Cairo was "90 per cent business", while Amman had been "half-business, half-politics".

Most of the 50 Israeli businessmen attending were

quite familiar with the Egyptian market. "We have old friends here," beamed Proper, who is also the president of the Manufacturers Association of Israel, adding that representatives from the Egyptian Federation of Industries had met them at the airport.

"We are also making new friends," Proper continued, looking at the Qatari business delegation leaflet conspicuously displayed across the table. Ironically, on the same day Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani told a news conference that his country had frozen normalisation measures with Israel and would not be opening a trade office in Israel.

Although the Israeli businessmen insist that they do not mix business with politics, most of them seemed to back the official line expressed by David Brodet, director general of the Israeli Ministry of Finance, that security concerns are the main reason behind Israel's closure of Palestinian territories, a policy which has further isolated Israel from its Arab neighbours.

Jordanian Minister of Transport Nasser Lozi said some aspects of Jordan's peace agreement with Israel, signed in 1994, were hampered by Israel's intensive security measures. Lozi explained that security searches on the Jordanian-Israeli border could last a few days, resulting in vast amounts of expensive Jordanian goods perishing before they reached the Palestinian territories.

Cross-border projects and regional bodies are also reflecting the negative political situation in the Middle East. Even the Middle East Development Bank (MEDB), which is close to being the first functional regional body, is facing financing problems, according to Gamal Mubarak, member of the executive committee of the Egypt-US Presidents' Council. "The idea is still on the table," he said, but little progress was expected for the MEDB in MENA III. The bank is waiting for commitment from the US, European and Gulf countries to holding shares in the bank.

Intra-regional projects like the regional electricity grid and the so-called "peace pipeline", whereby Egypt would export natural gas to Israel among others, are also on hold. "We will leave it until the right time," said Minister Ebeid, "then we will get connected." (see p.4)

Reported by Al-Ahram Weekly staff

All about business

Under a cloudy political sky, the businessmen gathered in MENA III seemed to be doing a lot of business, observes Dina Ezzat

There was little political squabbling at the Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference, as 4,000 businessmen and officials from 87 countries sat down together in the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) for seemingly endless seminars, workshops and tête-à-têtes.

Before its official opening on Tuesday, MENA III had been demoted from a summit and its official name changed to a "conference." But the change did not signify much to many businessmen. The conference continued to provide them with the opportunity for quiet discussions, one-on-one meetings and a careful scrutiny of fat dossiers that sought to shape the economic future of the region. Leaving politics for politicians, the businessmen sought to clinch deals, sign contracts and do business.

"This summit isn't really about politics as much as it is about economic promotion and cooperation," said an Egyptian entrepreneur. "The people who are here today are here to make money. If making money hinges on making deals with people who might otherwise be political foes, then this is what business is about."

With hundreds of smartly laid-out data sheets and a bustling business centre, in the shape of a small Pharaonic temple, Egypt tried to attract the attention and money of foreign investors. Gracing the floor of the CICC corridors was a large carpet on which the map of Egypt and the locations of investment opportunities were printed.

As she stood at the booth of the Egyptian Financial Group-Hermes, one of the largest investment-banking corporations, Nihal Wahbi said that business executives stopped at the stand to seek information

about the prospects of investing money in this country. "We are working hard to promote Egypt as a favourable investment environment and they are asking so many detailed questions," she said.

Wearing their traditional dark suits and carrying briefcases bursting with files, businessmen and entrepreneurs from around the world shook hands and shared ideas for what President Hosni Mubarak called the "rebirth" of the Middle East. Several of them appeared to be old friends, having met at the previous MENA conferences in Casablanca and Amman. And they did not seem to be concerned with the political debate of linking economic cooperation to comprehensive peace — an issue that at one stage threatened to delay MENA III.

As outgoing US Secretary of State Warren Christopher put it, the entrepreneurs taking part in the conference "did not come as an excursion."

A similar sentiment was echoed by an official from a Gulf state. "We need to put political disputes aside when we discuss economic cooperation," he said. This appeared to be the position of several

Gulf entrepreneurs who ignored an appeal by Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian minister of planning, that Israel's economic integration should be delayed until it honours its peace commitments. Dressed in their flowing white robes, Gulf Arab businessmen's secretaries were being welcomed by beaming Israeli delegates as, one by one, they entered the Israeli office on the third storey of the CICC.

"Israel is no longer isolated," asserted Christopher following a meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy. Expressing happiness to see Arab and Israeli businessmen who had met in Casablanca and Amman say "hello" to one another, Christopher affirmed that Israel will not go back to its isolation again.

Some 60 Israeli participants in the conference appeared very much at ease. They had coffee with the Americans in the Cyber Café, huddled with Egyptian businessmen and exchanged greetings in Arabic with the Gulf entrepreneurs. The only thing that seemed to interrupt their business talks was the ringing of the cellular telephones which were used in Egypt for the first time during the conference.

While Arab — and European — politicians used phrases such as "land for peace" and "a just and comprehensive settlement," the talk of the businessmen was dominated by "capital market," "interest rates" and "future cooperation."

At the end of a long working day, exhausted delegates could be seen relaxing in the various corners and lounges of the CICC. Some had taken off their shoes, others were using the cellulars to call home before they were driven back to their luxury hotels — for more business talk over dinner.



The entrance of the Egyptian pavilion at MENA III

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Conquering the desert

TELLING a joint session of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council that reclaiming the desert was no longer just a dream, President Hosni Mubarak announced on Sunday that the government planned to establish a "new delta" in the Western Desert to serve as a nucleus for new agricultural and industrial communities.

Mubarak called the plan "the project of the 21st century." "It is our ambition to establish a new delta in the Western Desert by reclaiming a half a million feddan area in the initial phase," Mubarak said.

An irrigation canal is to be dug to channel the Nile's water from the Toshki depression, behind the Aswan High Dam, to the oases of the New Valley in the Western Desert. "This project will give birth to new agricultural and industrial communities but will require a pioneer spirit and plenty of hard work to change life on the Egyptian land," Mubarak continued.

With the nation's population expected to jump to 85 million in 20 years, "leaving the narrow [Nile] valley and fanning out, in a planned and organised manner, throughout the country, has become an unavoidable necessity. In view of these facts, the conquest of the desert is no longer a slogan or a dream but a necessity dictated by the spiralling population growth. What is required is not a token exodus into the desert but a complete reconsideration of the distribution of population throughout the country."

Turning to Middle East policy, Mubarak affirmed Egypt's commitment to the cause of a just and comprehensive peace and said it would not be discouraged by those who seek to obstruct the peace process. "The peace to which we aspire, and which we made a strategic option, is a relationship between equal partners that ensures the security and interests of all and opens the door to a historical reconciliation," he said. "We are asking all parties to affirm, in a practical and concrete manner, that they have chosen peace as a strategic objective by demonstrating commitment to already concluded agreements... and moving forward along other tracks of negotiations on the basis of the sound principles that were agreed at the Madrid conference."

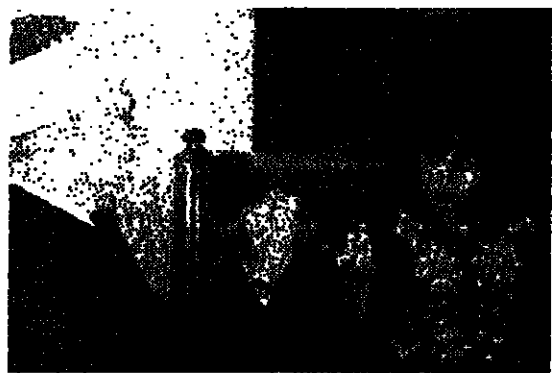


New mufti upholds his predecessor's rulings

Nasr Farid Mohamed Wassel, 59, has been dean of the Faculty of Law and Shari'a in the Nile Delta University of Daqahliya since last year. He was also a professor of post-graduate studies and the head of the Comparative Fiqh (Jurisprudence) Department at Al-Azhar University. He obtained his PhD in comparative jurisprudence in 1972.

Wassel started his career in 1966 with the general prosecutor's office. He later became a teacher, then a professor at the Faculty of Comparative Jurisprudence at Al-Azhar, and was seconded to universities in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. From 1981 until 1983 he served as the dean of the Faculty of Law and Shari'a in Assiut.

He has written more than 20 publications, studies related to Islamic shari'a, jurisprudence and legislation. The new mufti replaces Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, who has taken up the post of Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar.



"When Dar Al-Iftaa issues a fatwa... it is considered binding and executive bodies should abide by it and not any other fatwa"

What are the circumstances of your appointment as the new mufti?

It came as a big surprise. I had no hand in it. I was simply assigned the post and I accepted, that is all there is to it. The reasons for my appointment lie with the people who chose me. It is a great honour.

What were President Mubarak's directives when he met you on Monday?

There were no directives. The president told me that the post is entirely my responsibility and there would be no interference in matters related to shari'a [Islamic law] and fatwas [religious rulings]. He said that if there is a provision in Islamic shari'a that needs to be enforced then it is the task of the nation and the concerned bodies to do so. After meeting the president, it was clear that he upheld the principles of religion and that he was intent that matters should take the right course and be in the hands of specialists.

What is your future vision for Dar Al-Iftaa [the Mufti's office] to play its role properly?

Dar Al-Iftaa is playing its proper role, it has not renounced its duty at any stage. We will continue along the same path and discharge the same duties in a way that is in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunna [teachings of the Prophet], and, God willing, we will not deviate from them.

There have been differences in the fatwas and explanations issued by Dar Al-Iftaa and Al-Azhar. Which should Muslims follow?

The fatwa committee of Al-Azhar is a body of specialised scholars who base their fatwas on *ijtihad* [interpretation of religious texts] and research. They issue fatwas that are consultative documents and not binding, whereas Dar Al-Iftaa is attached to the Ministry of Justice and so has judicial pow-

Nasr Farid Mohamed Wassel was appointed as the new Mufti of the Republic by presidential decree on Monday. He spoke to Shaden Shehab

er. When Dar Al-Iftaa issues a fatwa, after studying all that is related to the matter concerned, then that fatwa is considered binding, and executive bodies should abide by it and not any other fatwa. The nation gave Dar Al-Iftaa this task... Dar Al-Iftaa is a judicial body specialising in religious matters and its fatwas are binding for all Muslims.

But why do Al-Azhar and Dar Al-Iftaa issue different fatwas? Is it true that Al-Azhar is conservative and Dar Al-Iftaa liberal?

People sometimes fail to distinguish between the different academic specialities. Fatwas

issued by bodies other than Dar Al-Iftaa are the outcome of research and interpretation, and are not legally binding. People may abide by them or seek someone else's view. But if we are looking for a binding ruling, by which everybody should abide, then we must go to Dar Al-Iftaa. Its rulings are binding and Muslims should abide by them. But it is natural to have differences of opinion even between judges; sometimes a primary court passes a certain judgement, then a higher court rules differently. Even laws can be interpreted in more than one way.

But you are both following the Qur'an and the Sunna, so there should not be any discrepancies. Matters are clear in the general rules which we call the *huda*, but there are other auxiliary aspects that change with time and place. Some religious texts are prone to different interpretations because the text allows this — it is not clear cut — that is why differences of opinion emerge.

What is your opinion regarding the matters on which Al-Azhar and Dar Al-Iftaa differed, such as female circumcision and bank interest?

Dar Al-Iftaa took a position on these matters and we should not discuss them again.

But what is your personal opinion?

I certainly agree with the fatwas [passed by Dar Al-Iftaa] concerning both matters. Female circumcision is a matter related to the people's traditions and customs and they should do whatever is in accordance with these customs and in their interests.

Some people consider that the guidance provided by Al-Azhar is sufficient, and have called for the abolition of the post of mufti. What is your comment?

This is not possible. They complement each other — one can't do without the other. Al-Azhar provides a forum for research that we can't do without. Dar Al-Iftaa is a judicial body whose intention is to prevent conflict.

Church celebrates Pope's silver jubilee

The Coptic Orthodox Church this week celebrated the silver jubilee of its head, Pope Shenoudah III. Mona El-Nahhas reports

Special prayers

were offered this week in Coptic Orthodox churches across the country to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the ascension of Pope Shenoudah III to the throne of St Mark. The principal ceremony was held on Sunday night at the Abbassiya Cathedral, which was bedecked with multi-coloured lights for the celebration. Similar festivities will begin on 18 November in the United States, Canada and Australia — home to thousands of Coptic immigrants.

Abbassiya Cathedral, which houses the Coptic Patriarchate, was crammed full for Sunday night's service. The celebration began with Shenoudah offering prayers for peace and love in Egypt, his invocations repeated by thousands of worshippers. As church choirs sang hymns in praise of the pope, Shenoudah sat on St Mark's throne.

A high mass was held afterwards and memorial medals bearing Shenoudah's picture were distributed to the congregation.

Among the guests of honour in the front pews were Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, minister of education, Hamdi Zaqqouq, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments), Mahmoud Sherif, minister of local administration, and Venice Kamel Gouda, minister of scientific research. Other members of the congregation included Omar Abdel-Akher, governor of Cairo, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, secretary-general of the Arab League, and Zakaria Azmi, head of President Hosni Mubarak's office.

The celebration also included speeches by bishops, hailing the patriotic stands taken by Shenoudah, such as his decision to prohibit Copts from making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem while the holy city is under Israeli occupation. He was also praised for throwing his weight be-

hind national unity and for opening Coptic churches in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia.

Shenoudah, previously named Nazir Gayed, became head of the Coptic Orthodox Church in November 1971 following the death of Pope Kyrillos VI. Born in 1923 in one of the villages of the southern Governorate of Assiut, Shenoudah was attracted to monasteries and monastic life from childhood. He obtained a bach-

elor's degree in history from Cairo University's Faculty of Arts in 1947 and, after serving in the armed forces, took a diploma at the Coptic Theological College.

It was in 1954 that Gayed decided to become a monk and joined the Al-Siryani Monastery in the Natroun Valley — west of the Cairo-Alexandria desert highway — taking the name of Antonious El-Siryani. Years later, he was chosen to serve as a bishop in charge of religious education and given the name of Shenoudah, which is Coptic for God's servant. After serving as the personal secretary of Pope Kyrillos VI, Shenoudah decided to return to the desert as a solitary monk, worshipping God in a desert cave.

Following the death of Kyrillos, Shenoudah was chosen as his successor. But in 1981, he fell out with the late President Anwar El-Sadat who accused him of fanning the flames of sectarian strife and banished him to a monastery in the Western Desert. He was allowed to return to Cairo and resume his functions as head of the church three years later by Sadat's successor, President Hosni Mubarak.

Shenoudah, who is a member of the Press Syndicate, is popular with Muslims as well as Christians. His declaration that Copts may not enter Jerusalem for prayer except in the company of their Muslim brethren has endeared him to many of both faiths.



Copts gather around Pope Shenoudah III as he sits on St Mark's throne

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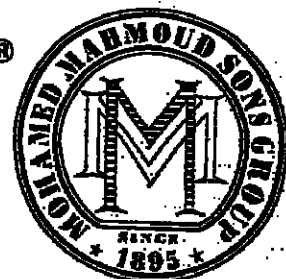
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Back to rent?

Housing experts are in disagreement over the importance, as well as possible impact on the market, of Prime Minister El-Ganzouri's decision to revive the rental system for apartments in government-owned buildings. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The collapse two weeks ago of an apartment building in Heliopolis, with the loss of 65 lives, continues to have ramifications in the area of rules governing the property market. As the nation awaits a report on the causes of the collapse, the tragedy has prompted Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri first to impose tougher penalties for housing offences and then to revive the rental system for apartments in government-owned buildings.

The speed with which El-Ganzouri acted has been welcomed by many. However, a few critics have charged that his actions were an emotional reaction, and not necessarily well-calculated.

El-Ganzouri has decided to switch from the system of selling state-owned apartments to a rental system — which had been in force until the mid-1970s. He described the decision as a practical and concrete move, in line with a new housing law, passed by the People's Assembly in February, which removed controls on rent for new apartments.

One reason the government decided on the switch, El-Ganzouri said, is that individual ownership of flats within a single apartment building had resulted in the deterioration of many buildings through lack of maintenance. It was also intended to encourage the private sector to follow suit and rent rather than sell apartments as a step towards solving the housing crisis. The decision will be applied first to apartments in buildings owned by the Ministry of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments) but will later be extended to buildings owned by other government departments and government-owned housing companies, El-Ganzouri added.

Housing experts at the People's Assembly, polled by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, were divided on the importance of El-Ganzouri's decision and its possible impact on the market. While some argued that it was of little significance and would not lead to a solution of the housing problem, others contended that it was an important, long-awaited move in response to public demand.

Mohamed Mahmoud Ali Hassan, chairman of the Assembly's Housing Com-

mittee, said he had been surprised by the decision. "I am unable to understand the true objectives behind this unexpected move," he said. Hassan recalled that the rental system was scrapped because the government found the cost of building maintenance too burdensome; by switching to a selling system, the government sought to shift the cost onto the residents. "So, what is new that made the government switch back to the rent system?" Hassan asked.

He was also concerned as to which government department would be responsible for building maintenance. Local (municipal) authorities could not be entrusted with the job, he maintained, because they were not only inefficient, failing to curb housing offences, but also corrupt.

The decision was unlikely to lead to a solution to the housing problem, Hassan argued. "It may be true that this decision will encourage the private sector to put its apartments up for rent, but it is equally true that it could cause apartment rents to skyrocket," he said. "By leaving rents subject to the laws of supply and demand, the new law will make apartments in new buildings beyond the reach of those in the low-income brackets." Thus, the decision could complicate, rather than alleviate, the housing problem.

Hassan, who heads the Federation of Egyptian Public Contractors, argued that the housing problem was not caused by either the sale or rental system, but was the result of "lax law enforcement, complicated licensing procedures and inefficient local administration systems."

To tackle the building maintenance problem, Hassan said the Assembly's Housing Committee was preparing a new bill to be submitted to the house during the current session, authorizing the formation of a "residents' association" in every building to collect a maintenance fee from residents and use it for repair work.

Mahmoud Mahfouz, chairman of the Assembly's Services and Manpower Committee, gave qualified praise to El-Ganzouri's decision. "For many years, we have been urging the government to modify the housing laws which froze rents, made

contracts untouchable and caused a slow-down in private sector construction of residential buildings for rent," he said. Despite providing the private sector with a golden opportunity, the new housing law had had little impact on the housing market, Mahfouz added. "This is why the government's decision to switch to the rental system [for government-owned buildings] is a bold step which is bound to encourage the private sector to move along the same track."

However, to complement this step, he suggested that the government should protect the public "by providing easy-term loans so that people can afford the expected rise in apartment rents."

As for maintenance, Mahfouz said the government needed to come up with a new strategy. He suggested the establishment of a holding company to take charge of maintenance work and monitor building specifications to make sure they conform to the construction code.

Talast Mustafa, deputy chairman of the Assembly's Housing Committee, was more pessimistic about the government's decision, which, he argued, was of little significance because "government-owned housing units are very limited in number." The number of apartments available for rent from the Ministry of Al-Awqaf (Religious Endowments) would not exceed 1,000. Moreover, the majority of housing companies once owned by the government have already been privatised, with shares sold on the stock market, Mustafa said.

He singled out the Development and People's Housing Company, which had been primarily involved in low-cost housing; this company went over to the private sector two months ago. And, in line with the dictates of the market economy, other government-owned companies had abandoned cheap housing, focusing instead on the luxury market, he added.

Mustafa believes there is little chance that the private sector will follow the government's lead. "I do not believe that the privatised companies will alter their policy in line with the government's decision," he said. "In my view, the decision was targeted to make a psychological, rather than a practical, impact."



Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak

Sultan Qaboos: "We are inseparable from the Arab world; our stances are always uncompromising"

Every 18 November marks the National Day of the Sultanate of Oman. This year, Sultan Qaboos will address his nation on the occasion of the Sultanate of Oman's 28th National Day. Qaboos' speech will be broadcast live via satellite and will be transmitted to all countries of the world.

The speech will shed light on the Sultanate's stances on Arab and regional issues and will review political and economic developments both locally and internationally.

It is worth noting that Sultan Qaboos' speeches are a true expression of the Omani viewpoint. Therefore, a closer look at these speeches will explain the strategies of Omani policy.

Since he came to power, Sultan Qaboos dedicated his efforts to build bridges for co-operation and peace among Arab countries. In expressing this orientation, the first address he delivered he called for co-operation with neighbouring countries.

Keen to build a strong basis for peace, Sultan Qaboos formulated Omani foreign policy to include the principles of good neighbourliness, non-intervention in the internal affairs of any country, non-alignment policy, respect of international laws, boosting cooperation among Gulf states and with all Arab countries without exception, supporting national causes in the Arab world and in any country worldwide, maintaining friendly ties with all nations of the world.

Sultan Qaboos' speech in 1974 declared his foreign policy principles, in which he stated "We will keep saying it; we are an inseparable part of the Arab world; our stances are always uncompromising".

Qaboos also made clear in this speech that out of understanding of the Sultanate of Oman's important role in the area, strong commitment to religious principles was and is still a must. It is worth mentioning that the Sultanate of Oman rejects reactionary policies. The Sultanate of Oman has been keen to be the one that initiates and controls the events. Out of this principle, Sultan Qaboos confirmed in his speech of 1976 that an evaluation of the role the Sultanate of Oman should assume is crucially important.

In his address to the nation in 1987, which marked the 17th National Day, Sultan Qaboos underscored the importance of dedicating all priorities to safeguard regional and international peace. To this end, the Sultanate of Oman demonstrated its concern by diffusing tensions and promoting dialogue as the acceptable means of ending disputes.

The speech of 1994, Sultan Qaboos said: "In observing the events worldwide, we have the right to be optimistic as countries of the world became convinced more than ever that military conflicts are a hindrance to peace and security and prove to be useless. We reject and condemn violence and terrorism. We care about human rights, and we have to close ranks to fight against terrorism."

Sultan Qaboos exerted countless efforts to establish the Gulf Cooperation Council. Out of his keen interest in supporting the foundation of this council, he stated in his speech in 1981, marking the Sultanate of Oman's 11th National Day, that the establishment of this council is a positive step, and that the Sultanate of Oman will contribute greatly to this council.

Sultan Qaboos underlined the framework for cooperative objectives in his 1993 speech, when he said: "We will work collectively with our Arab brethren to secure stability and peace in the region."

Sultan Qaboos chaired three summits of the Gulf Cooperation Council held in the Sultanate of Oman. These summits were the 50th, the 10th, and the 16th held last year. In the latter summit, Sultan Qaboos underscored the coordination in both security and defence among the Gulf states which will be a tool in consolidating ties. He indicated that the consultations in the military field have had a positive impact on the region. In the 10th summit, and particularly in the opening session, Sultan Qaboos proposed a work plan for the '90s. His address shed light on the international status quo, and its impact on the region. He also noted that this decade is a new one witnessing numerous changes, both politically and economically, which reformulates many concepts that prevailed for a long time in the international arena. In the same speech, Sultan Qaboos stressed the vital role of the Gulf Cooperation Council which requires new strategies that take into consideration recent global changes.

Although the Sultanate of Oman has a vested interest in Gulf affairs, this does not outweigh its interest in carrying out its national role within the Arab world as a whole.

Sultan Qaboos continually expresses his solidarity with the Arab League, and likewise emphasises that this role does not detract from his role within the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Within this framework, Sultan Qaboos emphasises the necessity of the League being an "active force in achieving solidarity and cooperation among Arabs and realising political, social and economic stability".

In his speech on the 3rd National Day in 1973, Sultan Qaboos said: "We are a part of the Arab world, linked by the same

goals and destinies, even before the advent of the Arab League's charter. Our stance on Arab issues is plain and firm, without confusion or ambiguity. We proclaim our solidarity with our Arab brethren in everything we do, for the Omani people harbour the true spirit of supporting Arab rights."

Emphasising this stance on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the League in 1995, Sultan Qaboos spoke of the achievements of the League's mission, saying it is "an important symbol of Arab solidarity".

In light of its important Arab role that the Sultanate of Oman played in the 6 October victory, Sultan Qaboos, during Oman's 4th National Day in 1974, said: "Our people, with all their abilities, took part with our Arab brethren in the 6 October victory... We are a part of the Arab world that cannot be removed. We are proud of our inclusion among other Arabs, and we are proud to have taken part in the battle. We share in solving problems, stressing the importance of deeds over mere words. This clearly manifested itself in the 6 October victory at the battles of El-Obour and El-Nasr, where ideas were transformed into actions that incorporated itself within Arab unity."

The stance of Sultan Qaboos vis-à-vis Egypt is truly reflected in his speeches and statements. Relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt have emphasis on the practical, arising from the belief of Sultan Qaboos of the necessity of Arab solidarity and the need for an Arab nation.

Within this framework, Egypt will never forget the initiative Sultan Qaboos took in a historic declaration which supported the Egyptian peace initiative. In a speech made on The Sultanate of Oman's 9th National Day in 1978, Sultan Qaboos stated that "the world is witnessing the first positive step on the road to peace in the Middle East".

Sultan Qaboos' efforts were not restricted to this step, for he took yet another historic initiative when he voted against the Arab boycott of Egypt. Oman's position did not end there, for it also exerted efforts to end the boycott. This reflected Oman's admiration for Egypt and its people, and these efforts led to a return of a united Arab front.

That Egypt is greatly admired by Oman was expressed by Sultan Qaboos on the 14th National Day in 1984, when he said: "The stages of recent history shows that Egypt is a fundamental element in the creation of a united Arab front."

And when Sultan Qaboos tackled the position of his country towards the developments of the Palestinian cause, in his speech on the occasion of the 25th National Day, it was as if he foresaw the future events that followed. His foresight was a result of a careful reading into the expected developments as indicated in light of his deep political analysis of the situation, and his long experience.

In light of this, Sultan Qaboos mentioned in his speech on that day a year ago: "As for the Middle East cause, we support peace, and we called for it. Our call reached even the Syrian, and the Lebanese fronts. We called for the complete withdrawal from the Golan, and southern Lebanon. And we stress our permanent position on these causes."

Sultan Qaboos' proposal in that concern, was an anticipation of the what was to come in the future, and it included the remedy for the expected uproar. His proposal demanded "the execution of the agreements reached between all parties concerned without creating any obstacles and a call to take serious steps to reach a fair solution towards unresolved issues." Sultan Qaboos made this proposal before the Israeli elections and before the collision between the Palestinians and the Israelis took place again. His proposals also came before the events which threatened the peace process. At the same time, he called for new ways to tackle the peace process in a way that would evade the inevitable.

Throughout all his speeches and interviews, Sultan Qaboos stresses how Oman maintains a fixed foreign policy of its own; a policy which does not restrict the freedom of the Omani political movement. On the contrary, it is a movement which rests on the diplomacy of openness, rationalisation, objectivity, and realistic ways adopted by the Sultanate of Oman. Stressing those policies adopted by his country which represent fixed policies, Sultan Qaboos said on last November's National Day: "We have always maintained our political principles, and our fixed positions emerging from our beliefs, and careful assessments of regional and international issues. Thus we have strengthened Islamic and Arab solidarity and co-operation. Our relations with the other countries, have always been based on mutual respect and interests. It is not our policy to intervene in another nation's internal affairs, we have thrived to resolve any conflicts peacefully, and we have respected and recognised all the international agreements and treaties. We have always been respectful of international law."

Today, the whole world awaits Sultan Qaboos' speech on the 28th National Day where he will assess and analyse the events of the past year, and put forth ideas to resolve forthcoming issues.

Meetings on MENA sidelines

ON THE sidelines of MENA III, President Hosni Mubarak met separately on Tuesday with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Christopher, who is resigning before the start of President Clinton's second term in office, had met late on Monday with Arafat.

Mubarak praised Christopher's efforts on behalf of peace in the region and the secretary of state, in turn, expressed confidence that "Egypt will continue to play its indispensable role, being the first country to reach a peace agreement with Israel and now helping to lead the way with other countries in the peace process."

Following the meeting with Arafat, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said that no discernible progress toward a settlement of the Hebron deployment issue had been made. The Palestinians and Israelis "will come to an agreement when they are ready," Burns said.

Christopher directed his senior Middle East adviser, Dennis Ross, to stay in Cairo for a few days in the event Israeli or Palestinian negotiators, in the Egyptian capital for the economic conference, wanted to meet with him. But Burns said Ross would not stay in the region for any protracted length of time. "The problem is both Israel and the Palestinians have not crossed the finish line yet," Burns said.

Spies arrested

AN ISRAELI of Arab origin and an Egyptian have been arrested by security authorities on suspicion of spying for Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. Prosecution officials ordered the two — Azam

Azam and Emad Abdel-Hamid — remanded in custody for 15 days after officially accusing them of "communicating" with a foreign country and acting to undermine Egypt's national interests.

Security sources said Azam, who was described as a Mossad agent, allegedly recruited Abdel-Hamid to work for the Israeli intelligence service and provided him with "material" which he would use in espionage. "Material evidence" was seized in their possession indicating that they have been involved in spying activities, the sources said.

Hijackers jailed

THE SUPREME State Security Court sentenced Mohamed Mahmoud Selim, 43, to life (25 years) imprisonment with hard labour on Monday for hijacking an EgyptAir plane to Libya last March. Two junior accomplices, Kamel Selim, 16, and Ahmed Hussein Kamel, 17, were sentenced to 10 years and three years imprisonment respectively for assisting Selim in the hijacking. A fourth defendant, Abdel-Wahab Moukhtar Said, 65, got seven years with hard labour for providing Selim with gunpowder which he used to force the pilot of the airliner — on a domestic flight from Luxor to Cairo — to change course to Libya.

The court said it found Selim guilty of deliberately planning and carrying out the hijacking and rejected the defence attorney's contention that he suffered from a mental illness.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

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Charting the course for the 21st century

In his opening speech to the conference, President Hosni Mubarak warned that unless a comprehensive peace on all tracks is firmly established, the Middle East will not reap the full benefits of economic integration. The following are excerpts from Mubarak's address

Down to business

Nevine Khalil looks at the prolific functions in MENA III

...Today we are witnessing the rebirth of the Middle East yet again. A rebirth that will generate a new dynamic in this region — one of prosperity, abundant, sustained and shared prosperity.

We are here to declare that the countries of this region have in common a deep yearning for a better day for our children.

I am convinced that this, and this alone, makes this region one that deserves prosperity as an integral part of the global economy — an active member of the community of nations.

Ladies and gentlemen: Today our countries are part of a global structure. There are no longer island economies, isolated blocs and closed systems. The principles of globalisation govern the order of our planet. All economic and financial decisions are made on a planetary scale. Direct investments are global, capital flows react to global variables, production and distribution respond to global trends. This is the character of the 21st century.

It is a charter that knows no exceptions and bears few deviations; one that evolves day-by-day, based on principles of free trade, free markets and the free flow of capital and investments worldwide. [It is] a charter we all are drafting, one that does not exclude or marginalise, coerce or impose; a charter that does justice to all nations, a common means to a common end.

Globalisation has imposed on all those countries that must belong to the world economy an order of strict conduct — rules by which economies address each other, in financial flows, in trade, in services, in investments, and for which the international community has built, with great care, the international and regional institutions we have today...

Our laws and institutions of economic management must conform to principles of global efficiency. This is the discipline of prosperity in the global economy of today — a discipline that I believe our region of the world needs to observe, for which it needs to build the institutions, draft the laws, train the people and, most of all, find the governments that will abide by it, for themselves and for their neighbours.

This process has started in the Middle East, it needs to be sustained and it needs the clarity of vision that will make it sustainable for years to come.

Egypt has found its path of equilibrium, a path to prosperity — one we have reached at the end of a 15 year journey of reform, and one that puts us at the threshold of greater welfare for all Egyptians: a welfare we will share with all those who share our values and join our ranks.

This year, Egypt has joined the global economy. It will abide by its rules. It will share in its prosperity.

From now on our economy can begin every year with all its financial equilibria in place. Last June, the national budget deficit was at 1.3 per cent of GDP. It is projected to come down for this fiscal year to 1.2 per cent. Inflation is at some 7.5 per cent now, and projected at about 6 per cent for the coming year. GDP has resumed growth. Last fiscal year it stood at over 4.5 per cent. This year, we hope to reach 5 per cent.

We enter the 21st century with a balance of payments that is viable, and a foreign debt that is no more than 30 per cent of GDP. Our country is open to the world. All capital flows enjoy absolute freedom of movement in and out of our economy. Free markets are now the sole arbiter for the allocation of resources in Egypt. Variables such as interest rates and the exchange rate reflect now the true strength of our economy, unaided and unrestrained.

The private sector plays an essential role in our economy. [It] sets the pace, generates employment and is seeking the rightful place that is Egypt's in the region and, indeed, in the world financial community.

Our policies for this stage of our economic programme aim at one fundamental goal: growth. A growth that touches the lives of all Egyptians, one that is sustainable, one that reflects the true potential of this country. To this end, our policies rely on three main dimensions of action: increased investments, greater openness to the global economy and the promotion of productivity growth.

Increased investment means, foremost, in-

creased foreign investments. These will come through accelerated privatisation, faster deregulation and an investment climate that will serve and cater to investors, both foreign and Egyptian. It will come through higher savings for which we continue to reform our financial institutions, in banking, insurance, social security and capital markets.

Greater openness to the outside world comes through the elimination of trade barriers, gradually exposing the Egyptian economy to the world at large. It will come through the development and implementation of a national programme of export promotion that will provide the markets that allow the Egyptian economy to grow. Growth in the Egypt of the 21st century lies in exports...

The third dimension of policy action revolves around productivity growth. We have established a number of institutions that will promote technology transfers, labour training and upgrading of the existing capital stock. The policies that attract foreign investment — trade liberalisation — will bring wider markets and technology transfers, both of which will increase productivity in the Egyptian economy.

These policies invest the reforms of the past 15 years for the greater welfare of all Egyptians. They come, however, as only part of the edifice of modern Egypt...

There is a new governance in Egypt, one based on transparency in the formulation of policies, in the institutions that manage them, and in the data that evaluate them. Our economy is one of participation, with the private sector playing an important role on the path to prosperity. Our policies must remain predictable, our institutions reliable and our laws and regulations fair and enforceable. These are the guarantees of our success. These are the daily tasks of our government.

Ladies and gentlemen: Egypt is not alone in this rebirth. Country after country in our region has opted for sound economic and financial policies, flexible institutions, market-based management and a vital role for the private sector in economic growth. Day after day, we progress to-

wards greater harmonisation of our economic and financial policies. Day after day, our economies move closer to their goals, and closer together. Today, more than ever before, we can look for a core of countries in this region that share their values, their vision, their policies and are willing to share their future.

With time, this core will expand, attract others and gradually become the power source for the well-being of the peoples of this region. Time is pressing, however. Large economic blocs have become the dominant feature of the world economic landscape for the 21st century... Our place in the global economy lies in our cohesion, in the harmony of our policies and our economies, but, most of all, in our shared hopes for prosperity.

Regional infrastructure projects — in power, energy, transport, communication and environment — await our integration. Greater regional trade should be within reach. Better coordination among our policies should magnify their positive impact on our peoples... Our economies have grown closer, in greater harmony with each other. Yet, this is not close enough, for as long as comprehensive peace on all tracks is not firmly and irreversibly established among us, we will not reap the full benefits of our economic integration.

Ladies and gentlemen: The Middle East and North Africa has everything for a prosperous future. It also has the seeds of a future of misery and turmoil. We have chosen prosperity. Help us build it.

The only common enemies we have — Muslim, Christian and Jew alike — are poverty, ignorance, intolerance and a short-sighted grasp of our future.

Few things are worthy of an unconditional commitment. A peace that is founded on justice and liberty deserves such a commitment. We are reaching today for our future. Together let us not lose sight of it. Together let us build it, build a peace that is just, build a prosperity that is for all. For it shall not be said, centuries from today, that our countries had peace within their grasp and squandered it.



Many of the Arab participants in MENA III ignored the Israeli delegation, focusing more on Arab-Arab cooperation. Nonetheless, Israel took its place among participating countries at the business booth, shown temporarily deserted at far left, while Palestine, enjoyed much attention from the 5,000 business, official and media people attending MENA III. (photos: Randa Shaath)

From Madrid to Barcelona

Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring, whose country currently holds the presidency of the European Union, drew applause on Tuesday when he called for a comprehensive Middle East settlement based on trading land for peace. The following are excerpts from his address to the conference

The structures for economic cooperation in the Middle East are being built methodically and painstakingly.

The presence of so many business leaders at this Cairo conference serves to demonstrate the great potential for economic cooperation that exists in this region.

This meeting in Cairo takes place at a time of serious crisis in the Middle East peace process. I have to stress that the European Union is deeply concerned by the recent tragic events in the region as well as by slow progress in the direct talks between the parties. We are committed to the peace process for the long haul, un-

til a just, lasting and comprehensive peace can be reached in the Middle East. The union... has a responsibility both to the region and to itself to put the peace process back on track.

The recent appointment of Ambassador Moratinos as special EU envoy to the Middle East underlines our determination to ensure that the EU's involvement in the peace process should correspond with our long-standing engagement in the region. I should like to emphasise that the special envoy will fulfil his mandate in close cooperation with all parties in the region and complementary

to the important role which the UN plays in the peace process.

The European Union is more than ever convinced that peace in the Middle East depends on the full implementation of the existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to the parties from Egyptian soil, from the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, to reclaim the spirit of Madrid and Oslo and to continue towards the common goal of a lasting, just and comprehensive peace for the whole region, on the basis of all relevant resolutions of

the UN Security Council, and the principle of land for peace.

The European Union has strongly supported the multi-lateral track and looks forward to the resumption of talks on that track when the current impasse on the implementation of the interim agreement has been resolved.

The European Union is trying to advance its economic cooperation with, and assistance to, the region on various levels. Since the last MENA summit in Amman, there have been a number of positive developments in Euro-Mediterranean relations: — In the multilateral con-

text, the Barcelona Declaration of November 1995 has paved the way for a new partnership based on a common commitment to close cooperation, to an enhanced political dialogue, to stability, human rights and the reinforcement of democratic institutions and to the progressive establishment of a free trade area, for which the parties to the Barcelona process have set 2010 as the target date.

At the bilateral level, negotiations have been concluded, or are under way, between the EU and Mediterranean countries on a whole new generation of as-

sociation agreements which will further enhance our cooperation across the board.

The union has worked hard since the 1991 Madrid conference to help those involved in the Middle East peace process to alleviate disparities, settle disputes and promote regional economic growth through the Regional Economic Development Working Group and, as the largest international donor of aid, the union has provided consistent support to the Palestinian people. The union has also actively assisted in the establishment and consolidation of the regional institutions that were set up in Amman in 1995.

Lisoz

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On November 15, 16, 17 1996 the USAID Warehouse will be hosting a disposal sale at the Zahraa City Warehouse. Residential and Office Furniture as well as assorted other items will be for sale. The sale will be open to the public from 9 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.

Bidders must purchase a bid package before entering for a nonrefundable deposit of LE 5. Bids may be submitted at any time during the sale and must be accompanied by a 10% deposit against the total amount of the bid. No bids will be accepted after 2:30 P.M. on November 17th. All lots must be picked up and paid for at the sale site on November 22 & 23, from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M.

The USAID Warehouse is located in the newly developing community of Zahraa City located on the opposite side of the Autostrade Highway from Maadi (near the New Horizon School). On the days of the sale there will be signs directing visitors from Maadi.

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Copy of updated Tax Card as well as a Registration of Sales Tax Authority and the Commercial Record, should be submitted together with the bid bond, otherwise the offer will be disregarded.

مكتبة من الأصل

A different Clinton?

First signals make it unlikely that Clinton will use his new mandate to put pressure on Netanyahu. Hoda Tawfik, in Washington, and Graham Usher, in East Jerusalem, write

As newly re-elected US President Bill Clinton tries to make a fresh start and ponders over a new cabinet, his policy towards the peace process is, unfortunately, doomed to remain the same as it was in his first term.

The name of the game is no change as far as Israel, the big ally, and America's strategic interests are concerned. This is how most of the prominent Arab American organisations interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* in Washington see the situation.

The Middle East crisis is one of the most serious foreign policy problems facing Clinton in his second term. The challenge is how to save the stalled Palestinian-Israeli peace process from collapsing altogether.

In his first press conference since his re-election, President Clinton last Friday seemed at a loss as to how to deal with the crisis. "If we can clear the Hebron [re-deployment] hurdle, it has such

emotional significance to both sides, as well as such practical significance, that I believe it will open the door [for us] to go on and overcome all the other challenges that are before us," he said.

But his first reaction to a question about Palestinian President Yasser Arafat calling on him to pressure Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu was startling. The questioner, a Palestinian journalist, began by congratulating the president. "Thank you," Clinton said, but the moment he heard the question, he retorted, "You had to remind me it was congratulations and not condolences!"

President Clinton managed to get through his re-election campaign unscathed by any foreign policy crisis, but a number of delicate problems have the potential to give him nightmares over the next four years. The Middle East is likely to continue to prove troublesome to the administration as Clinton continues to deal with the peace process as an ally of Israel, rather than as an honest mediator.

Khalil Jabshan, president of the Arab American Association, told the *Weekly*, "Don't expect any change in the American policy vis-à-vis the Middle East. Those who expect Clinton to be less dependent on Jewish support in his second term, and therefore tougher on Netanyahu, are mistaken."

"The reason behind this, first, that Clinton will work to guarantee the success of the Democratic Party in the year 2000 under the leadership of his vice-president, Al Gore. He is certain that he needs the support of the Jewish lobby. It is no secret that the lobby financed 60 per cent of Clinton's presidential campaign and that 90 per cent of Jewish voters supported Clinton. Clinton also needs the support of their influential lobby in the Congress."

Jabshan appealed to Arabs to use the administration's transitional period to talk to the US president.

"What is at stake is not to yield to the status quo, but to work hard to change it, using all the Arab cards."

The Egyptian ambassador to Washington, Ahmed Maher El-Said, was more optimistic, however. "It is obvious that Clinton does not approve of Netanyahu's policies. We expect him to be vigorous in his rejection of such policies and to confront Israel's aggressive policy, which has derailed the peace process."

But, like Jabshan, Hala Maksood, president of the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee, could not pin any hopes on a second and final Clinton term. "Clinton's ideology is to support Israel," she said. "The point is not that he will be free in his second term from Jewish pressure. The reason he has not put pressure on Netanyahu so far lies in his ideological position."

Maksood added, "We will be gravely mistaken if we expect that the new administration will put pressure on Israel," she said.

... Unlikely

Bill Clinton's re-election as US President on 5 November won predictable approval from the PLO and the Arab world generally. "I congratulate (Clinton) and congratulate myself, the Palestinian people and the Arab nation for this victory which will bring stability and give a push to the peace process," greeted PLO leader Yasser Arafat one day after the vote. It was a line echoed by Jordan. "We think Clinton's re-election opens the door for a more active role by the US and we welcome this," said Jordan's Information Minister, Marwan Mousher, on 6 November.

The Israeli government also applauded Clinton's win, though its assessment of the impact it will have on the stalled Oslo process was more sober and, in all probability, more accurate. "If (Arafat) is waiting for the great pressure that has to come from Washington, he will be disappointed... The whole idea that Netanyahu will stand and be whipped by the next US president is simply not serious," said Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu. Israeli opposition leader, Shimon Peres, agreed. "I do not

foresee pressure from the US," he said.

Palestinians and Arab hopes are based on the assumption that relations between the incumbent US administration and Israel are at their lowest ebb since President Bush threatened to withdraw \$11 billion worth of loan guarantees to the Sharmat government in 1992. Then, pressure appeared to work, with the final state of US/Israel relations being a factor behind the electoral victory of Yitzhak Rabin's Labour coalition later that year.

Like pressure today — so the argument goes — would force Netanyahu into proceeding with a peace process that has been in crisis since his Likud coalition was elected last May. "It is prime time that the US played an active role in the peace talks between Palestinians and Israel and acts as a referee," says former PLO negotiator and speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Ahmed Qudsi.

The problem for the Palestinians is that Clinton and his administration have never been a "referee" in the peace process. The record since Oslo shows rather the US consistently backing the Israeli agenda in the negotiations and, when these broke down, acting as a firefighter to put out the flames.

Thus, in the aftermath of the 1994 Hebron massacre, it was Clinton who prevailed on Arafat not to condition negotiations on the removal of Jewish settlers from Hebron, despite a consensus among both Palestinian and Israeli opinion that this was the only way Oslo could be salvaged.

Even after the military and popular confrontations that rocked the West Bank and Gaza in September, Netanyahu stalled redeployment in Hebron. After a month of wholly inconclusive talks on the issue, Palestinian negotiators are as frustrated with the US's "mediation" as they were at the outset.

"We expected Dennis Ross" (the US Middle East special envoy and "facilitator" for the Hebron negotiations) "to say at least who is responsible for the delay in implementing the agreement over Hebron, and who wants to change the original agreement," said chief PLO negotiator, Saeb Erekat, last week. Ross left for Washington on 29 October, saying very little. He has yet to return.

With the election now over, it may be that the US will push Israel to "clear the Hebron hurdle" and so "fulfil all the other challenges that there are before us," as put by Clinton in Washington on 6 November. But it is unlikely to do much else.

Instead of wasting much time and effort on the Oslo process, Clinton may be content with keeping it afloat, while waiting either for the collapse of Netanyahu's coalition into a national unity government or for its defeat in the next Knesset elections.

"When it comes to the US pressure on Israel, it is not a question of ability but of consequences," says Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé. "If the result of greater pressure on Netanyahu is a crisis in US/Israel relations, as well as no movement on Oslo, I don't see Clinton taking the risk."

In such circumstances, it may be wiser for the Palestinians not to also risk pinning all their hopes on a transformed Clinton "whipping" Netanyahu into line.

Bumpy road ahead for new Lebanese government

With 30 per cent of Lebanon's population living in poverty, can the new government balance its desire to reconstruct the country with concern for its citizens? Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

Over two weeks ago, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri was charged with forming his third cabinet since taking office in October 1992. Two weeks of intense bickering ensued as members of the ruling "troika" — President Elias Hrawi, House Speaker Nabih Berri and Hariri vied for influence in the new cabinet line-up. Finally, a compromise was reached with the mediation of Syrian officials. Damascus is the main power broker in the country, and the new council of ministers was chosen. The new cabinet was sworn in on Monday.

The new cabinet is not what Hariri had in mind, despite the fact that he did retain control over ministries instrumental to the implementation of his multi-billion dollar reconstruction plan. Hariri, who won a seat for the first time in parliament in the elections this summer, has a strong parliamentary base, but now faces the possibility of opposition within his own cabinet.

There were no dramatic changes in the composition of the new 30-member cabinet, where half of the members are Christian, while the other half are Muslim. The top ministries such as those of the interior, foreign affairs, defence, justice and economy remain in the same hands. Hariri continues to hold the Finance Ministry portfolio and his close ally, Fouad Sanayoura, retains his post as state minister for financial affairs, thereby effectively allowing the prime minister a free hand in the running of the Finance Ministry. Additionally, the prime minister now also assumes responsibility for the Post and Telecommunications Ministry.

Hariri has said repeatedly that he wants a homogeneous government where all ministers work together to rebuild Lebanon. He also wanted to confine the opposition to the parliament and to keep it out of the government. But the new cabinet is not devoid of opposition. Critics and outspoken rivals of Hariri are now ministers and many observers expect internal disputes to become endemic.

Analysts liken the new council of ministers to the prime minister's first government. At the time, Hariri had threatened to resign a number of times when rivalries erupted, not only in government but also in parliament, between the opposition ministers and the supporters of government policy. A few old enemies of Hariri now have returned to government even though the prime minister had managed to exclude them from the government he had formed in May 1994.

Opposition figures, such as the newly-appointed health minister, Maronite deputy Silyman Frangieh; emigrants' minister, Druze deputy Tala Arslan; minister of the environment, Druze Akram Shehaye and tourism minister, Greek Catholic Nicola Fattouch, all have a record of opposition to Hariri's policies.

Also, one of Hariri's former allies, minister of the displaced and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, is now his worst enemy. Jumblatt charges that the prime minister has become too powerful. "The opposition will be active inside the cabinet," he said. "He [Hariri] controls the finance, telecommunications, in-

formation, justice and transportation ministries. This greed, particularly in financial matters, should not be allowed to continue and should be curtailed." The Progressive Socialist Party, headed by Jumblatt, has vehemently criticised Hariri for ignoring the needs of the poor while rebuilding the country. The party is represented in the new government by both Jumblatt and Shehaye.

Hariri's enemies were appointed to the new cabinet after Maronite President Hrawi pushed for a politically balanced government, one that represents the entire political spectrum instead of a cabinet made up of Hariri's allies. President Hrawi and Speaker Berri were able to ensure the appointment of a number of their supporters to government.

According to Silyman Takkiedine, a political analyst, both Hariri and Hrawi managed, to a certain extent, to achieve their aims. "Hariri may not have been able to avoid the inclusion of opposition members in cabinet but he has key allies in ministries which are directly related to his reconstruction programme for the country," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Most of the ministries related to services are in his hands."

Hariri wants to avoid dealing with internal opposition when pushing for the implementation of his reconstruction projects. The prime minister's strong bloc in parliament and his electoral alliance with Berri are ultimately aimed at allowing the quick ratification of his projects.

Takkiedine added that Hrawi, for his part, managed to ensure that his Maronite community has a share in the new government. "For example, the foreign and education ministries are theirs. To the Maronites, the Education Ministry is important. The Maronites want to have a say in how history is taught in schools. They want to make sure their views, which tend to conflict at times with those of other religious sects in the country, are safeguarded and propagated."

Even before the new government held its first session, it came under criticism. Some politicians opposed to Hariri's policies have attacked it, saying that it will not be able to deal with the political, social and economic challenges facing the country. However, according to the newly-appointed state minister for administrative reform, deputy Bishara Merhej, the new government will work hard since it is faced with a tough situation. "Lebanon is confronted with many challenges, not only on the local scene but regionally as well," he told the *Weekly*. "These include the situation in South Lebanon, where Israel continues to occupy Lebanese territory in a clear breach of international resolutions. The new government has to deal with the difficult social and economic situation of the country. It must tackle this seriously since it is a grave problem that could have negative future repercussions. The ministers have to work together to be able to achieve the desired goals."

The composition of the new cabinet will be put to a parliamentary vote of confidence in the coming weeks. But its real test will be whether it can alleviate the suffering of many of its citizens and rid the public administration of corruption.

Turkey's dangerous military games

The frequent incursions by the Turkish military into northern Iraq have failed to flush out the PKK guerrillas, but Turkish officials are intent on continuing their hot pursuit despite heavy criticism. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports

In their campaign to root out the separatist Kurdish rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkish troops crossed into northern Iraq early last week and stormed a PKK hideout, killing at least 35 fighters. A major victory, however, eluded the Turkish troops since, according to Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller, Osman Ocalan, brother of the PKK leader, narrowly escaped death in the attack.

The operation was described by a Turkish military official as smaller than the major incursion that took place last spring after 35,000 Turkish troops were deployed in northern Iraq. The official, however, refused to say how many soldiers were involved in the latest incursion, but made the point that Turkish forces had not gone farther than 15km into Iraq.

Abdullah Gul, the Turkish state minister for foreign affairs, pledged that the military incursions would continue in the future "to bring to a halt the terrorist activities of the PKK."

"They are killing Kurdish peasants in the name of liberation," said Gul. "The PKK has deliberately and arbitrarily killed women, children and old people in Kurdish areas while the Turkish army is protecting civilians," Gul added. He explained that, on average, three Turkish soldiers are killed

by the PKK daily. Gul dismissed accusations that the army itself was attacking Kurdish villages and killing civilians. The reason for the intensification of military action, he added, was that the PKK guerrillas were massing along the 150-mile border and could slip into Turkey anytime. "We have to stop these infiltrations," he said. "We will take the necessary measures to do so and evaluate these measures with neighbouring countries."

For the past two months, the Turkish army has been building up its arsenal and massing troops along the Iraqi border, in apparent readiness to attack the Kurdish guerrillas. Army officials, however, would neither confirm nor deny Turkish press reports that troops already have mounted some cross-border attacks.

The area concerned covers 10 out of Turkey's 76 provinces and is controlled from Diyar Bakir, an ancient city above the Tigris and the most affected by the war. The area then extends to Habous, the last checkpoint on the Iraqi border. It has been the scene of the 12-year-old war between the Turkish army and the PKK fighters who want to carve an independent Kurdish state out of south-eastern Turkey. About 21,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

Since the end of the Gulf War, the fighting has intensified. The PKK has frequently used northern Iraq's rugged terrain as a base for staging attacks across the border, benefiting from the breakdown of authority in the Kurdish-controlled "no-fly" zone. But, according to Turkish strategist Hassan Koni, the policy of launching major incursions into Iraqi soil is not urgently needed since the PKK already has lost much of its military clout.

Until about five years ago the PKK was able to keep the Turkish army out of large areas of the south-east and move in and out of Syria at will. The safe haven, however, now gives the Turks a listening post in Iraq at Zakho, which is manned by Turkish as well as British and American troops. This has effectively enabled the Turkish army to attack PKK bases and force the movement underground in Turkey itself.

Turkish politicians have expressed growing fears that the unsettled feud between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) would allow the PKK to become what one Turkish diplomat called "the third power in northern Iraq." He added that Ankara has until now failed in its efforts to enlist any of the Iraqi Kurdish groups to help rein in PKK operations in Iraq.

The main Iraqi Kurdish factions, the KDP and the PUK, partners in the ongoing peace process brokered by the United States and Turkey, have expressed support for Turkey's legitimate security interests in its struggle against the PKK. They have pledged to fight any terrorist activities in northern Iraq, particularly from the PKK.

The KDP, however, issued a statement on Sunday denouncing the Turkish military ally. The statement went as far as describing the latest operation as "an unjustifiable aggression against the Kurdish people."

The latest incursion also has drawn heavy criticism from Turkish diplomats who believe that these military operations adversely affect Turkey's image in the international arena. The operations were sharply criticised by European Union members who expressed fears that they would further destabilise the region. Consequently, EU members have urged Turkey to open dialogue with the PKK.

"Turkey's foreign policy image is very poor. Europe is throwing the issue of the Kurdish problem and the issue of human rights in one basket. They [Europeans] believe that people are silenced and that political and social rights are restricted for the sake of fighting against the PKK," said Se-

det Ergin, a veteran commentator for the daily newspaper *Haririyet*.

The military operation came a few days after a decision was taken by six committees in the European Parliament to put pressure on Turkey to start talks with the PKK and to release its members from jail. Mehmed Izzet, editor of the *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* published in London and supporter of Abdullah Ocalan, says, "If we acknowledge that the Kurds have been or are being subject to genocide, we cannot stand by idly. But in south-east Turkey, the government justifies the killing of Kurds with the PKK rebellion. This is a form of blaming the victim."

Turkey's military operations have been supported by the United States because, according to a White House spokesman, the US believes that the Turks have genuine reasons to be concerned about their border. According to Michael Turner, a specialist on Turkish affairs at the California-based United States International University, Washington is in as much a dilemma as Turkey. "Washington is caught up in a dilemma created by the Turkish incursions. On the one hand, the US knows that what Turkey is doing stirs up the Kurds in northern Iraq and produces situations of instability and inter-tribal fighting. On the

other hand, the US supports Ankara's attempts to curb separatism and terrorism in south-east Turkey," he said.

The US administration, as Turner explained, wants to show its support for a unified, integrated, Western-oriented Turkey. "Washington is likely to continue this stance as long as Turkish military incursions do not alter the strategic balance in that part of the world," Turner told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He warned, however, that the net effect of all the Turkish military actions is unlikely to curb the PKK infiltrations into Turkey. "The PKK fighters are much better at blending into the Iraqi countryside or escaping into friendly Syria than the Turkish army is at pursuing the PKK guerrillas. These incursions are unlikely to stop the PKK," he said.

Kamal Kirieli, professor of international relations at the Istanbul-based Bogazi University, has sharply criticised the military incursions, describing them as "a policy which amounts to damage control of Turkish security interests."

"Turkey cannot play with the military card for long. Besides it cannot go on messing around with other countries' integrity and get away with it because the same game could be played against itself," said Professor Kirieli.

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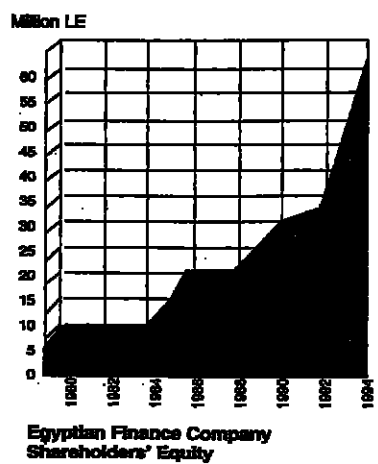
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Kabila's historic cabal

Zaire's President Mobutu gears up to crush Kabila's opposition forces. Can Mobutu break up Kabila's cabal, asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

Do African countries need standing armies? If African countries' security problems could be cured by propping up the continent's armed forces, who would refuse the remedy? South Africa apart, the continent's leaders now administer carefully measured and diluted doses of democracy. This might be an opportune moment for Africa to be tightening the screws on its 50-odd national armies. Alas, Africa's military forces — in and out of power — are staging a counter-offensive; they are determined to drag the continent into a vicious circle of violence and chaos. The nightmarish events in eastern Zaire over the past few weeks have prompted most Africa-watchers to expect the worst scenarios — civil wars and genocide by starvation and unspeakable hardship — as the continent descends into a downward spiral of political confusion and ethnic conflict.

African armies are ill-equipped to defend African countries' territorial integrity. By international standards, African troops are paid next to nothing. Africa's armies are a threat to the continent's security and political stability. There is a legacy steeped in blood, coups d'état and counter-revolutions.

Last Monday, the Zairean government warned aid agencies operating in eastern Zaire that they would lose their right to work inside the country if they cut a "treacherous" deal with Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire. The aid agencies have become embroiled in a civil war that cannot be controlled or contained. The last foreign aid workers fled the fighting in eastern Zaire over a week ago. Kabila's forces seized control of the Zairean cities of Gombe and Bukavu — the main aid centres helping over one million ethnic Hutu refugees.

The head of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Salim Ahmed Salim, and most African foreign ministers and officials meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, this week for the OAU's conflict prevention mechanism, suspect that the root cause of the current crisis in eastern Zaire was the failure of the aid agencies to separate the soldiers from the refugees.

"It is indeed a pity," Ethiopian President Meles Zennawi said in a press conference in Addis Ababa on Tuesday, "that when African countries have shown a clear disposition to fulfil their responsibilities and to take the lead on matters that affect them directly, that they are denied an effective means to do this by the same international community which has nevertheless shown readiness to spend billions in addressing the humanitarian problem."

Canada offered on Monday to lead an international force to open humanitarian corridors in eastern Zaire. The French, who first proposed the rapid deployment force, were out-voted at the UN Security Council on Saturday, postponing a decision on the French proposal until 20 November.

If African armies are a write-off, what about foreign ones? Former colonial powers have strategic interests in Africa. When they intervene militarily in their former colonies, it is without fail to change the fortunes of war in such a way as serves their interests. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, and Patrice Lumumba, the celebrated first prime minister of the country which was later to become Zaire, were ideological and political soul-mates. Ghana and Zaire had signed a secret agreement making the two countries the nucleus of a larger continental union of African states. Nkrumah planned to create a continental army. Nkrumah and Lumumba worked closely together to end the crisis in the Congo in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They were against the intervention of foreign forces precisely because foreign interventionist troops are invariably identified with one or another of the local warring protagonists.

Another brainchild of Nkrumah, the OAU, has been pushed to the sidelines. South Africa suspended arms sales to Rwanda last Wednesday. There are grave doubts that South Africa's army —

a recent and tortuously uncomfortable amalgam of black Marxist-inspired freedom fighters and white anti-communist professional hit squads — can impress anyone in Central Africa.

Nkrumah's dream of African unity had a rude awakening when Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku caught and tortured Patrice Lumumba. Nkrumah's vision of pan-African unity received another setback

with the death in detention of another like-minded revolutionary, pan-Africanist Pierre Mulele, who was tortured to death in October 1968 by Mobutu's men. Mulele was a close colleague and comrade-in-arms of Nkrumah and Lumumba. Mulele's abduction by the Mobutu regime sent shock waves throughout the African revolutionary world. "I wonder why he fell into that nasty trap. Why did he trust Mobutu? That Mobutu regime has a criminal and sadistic mind. For a trained guerrilla like Mulele to have believed in the promises of Mobutu beats me," Nkrumah said. Mulele led one of the most successful Maoist insurrections in Africa, the Kwilu Peasant Uprising, but it was cut short by the CIA's intervention in 1965.

"As the people's revolutionary struggle advances, professional armies as such will gradually disappear," wrote Nkrumah in the 1960s. Nkrumah anticipated that revolutionary insurrectionists would challenge what passes for Africa's professional armies. He saw that the people-based African revolutionaries would inevitably clash with foreign troops feigning their defence of humanitarian concerns on the continent. International military intervention in eastern Zaire is unacceptable to most African leaders — with the notable exception of Mobutu, his hangers-on and his henchmen. "The people of [Zaire] will undoubtedly decide their own future free from foreign interference. Difficulties and uncertainties will have to be faced. But of one thing I am sure. The victors in the final battle for [Zaire's] emancipation will spring from the blood of Lumumba," Nkrumah prophesied in his classic *The Challenge of the Congo*.

Some argue that foreign interference does not prevent African politicians from getting things done their way. Perhaps, but this is not the point. An international acknowledgement that the world is listening to African demands for self-determination is badly needed. Take the case of Zairean opposition forces and Rwanda. A key Zairean opposition leader, Laurent-Désiré Ka-

bila, warned that French troops must not be involved in the proposed international military force to be sent to eastern Zaire. Kabila heads the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire. Kabila, whose troops are fighting the Zairean army in eastern Zaire, opposes a French-directed multinational force. He also opposes the French plan to construct "humanitarian corridors" to funnel the 1.5 million ethnic Hutu refugees back to Rwanda. How then can French soldiers be sent to the region as peacekeepers?

The leaders of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, three countries bordering eastern Zaire, unanimously voiced opposition to French military interference in the region. Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu, an ethnic Hutu, warned recently that France, "always supported the regime and acted as Mobutu's protector. Mobutu, convalescing from prostate cancer surgery in his Villa del Mare in an up-market stretch of France's Mediterranean Côte d'Azur, made it clear that he was in no mood to return to Zaire in a hurry. Mobutu said that he would not be going back to Zaire until he had fully recovered. The European Union's humanitarian aid commissioner, Emma Bonino, is at a loss as to what to do. Several European powers have contradictory — even conflicting — agendas in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

During France's Operation Tourquoise in 1994-95, Foreign Legionnaires occupied large tracts of Rwanda. French forces created so-called safe havens in Rwanda and Zaire to protect ethnic Hutu chieftains who carried out the systematic slaughter of some 500,000 ethnic Tutsi and allied moderate Hutu. France now wants to set up so-called "humanitarian corridors" in eastern Zaire where Hutu refugees could take shelter. Some of these people are fugitives from justice. In Europe, such an act would be tantamount to providing safe havens to the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust against Jews, Gypsies and Jews.

The Banyamulenge people, Zairean Tutsi, oppose the deployment of foreign forces to end the conflict in eastern Zaire. The Banyamulenge have been targeted by the Zairean army for retribution for allegedly instigating a separatist rebellion. Kabila argues that the war is not an ethnic conflict but a revolutionary struggle against the oppression of the Mobutu regime. Zaire's Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo is an ethnic Tutsi himself. Foreign intervention looms large in France's plans for the region. Foreign interests have kept Mobutu in power for the last four decades.

Mobutu's personal fortune is conservatively put at \$6.3 billion. Zairean diplomatic missions in Switzerland owe the Swiss authorities a couple of million dollars, while Mobutu was until recently paying over \$1,250,000 a day for occupying 15 suites in the Hotel Beau Rivage at Lausanne, Switzerland. There is an ugly trade-off between Mobutu's private wealth and his people's misery and his country's bankruptcy. America's CIA politically created the international statesman Mobutu out of an obscure and barefoot office boy called Joseph-Désiré. If one single thing is striking about Mobutu, it is not how rich or ruthless he is, but how little his chances of survival would have been had he not been on the payroll of the powers that be in Washington, Paris and Brussels for much of his 40 years in power.

The obvious answer is to do away with African armies that appear to relish any chance of dealing heavy blows against unsuspecting civilians — be they fellow citizens or refugees from neighbouring countries. Students in the Zairean capital have taken matters into their own hands. Last week, they stormed the country's parliament in the capital Kinshasa, calling for the overthrow of the Mobutu regime. The students were regarded as Lumumbists. Lumumbists also make up the core of Kabila's cabal. How history repeats itself!

Kabila's cabal could spell disaster for Mobutu's cosy arrangement — running his country by remote control from Lausanne, the Côte d'Azur and his hometown Gbadolite. Kabila did not fall into obscurity after Lumumba's murder in January 1961. He took his cue from Latin American Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara, who was visiting at the time, to launch a peasant-based guerrilla force — the People's Revolutionary Party — in eastern Zaire. Kabila later appeared with Zairean Marxist leader Antoine Gizenga in the international Permanent People's Court in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam in September 1982 protesting the gross violations of human rights under the Mobutu regime. It would be poetic justice if Mobutu's regime happens to be laid finally to rest by Kabila's latest Marxist-inspired cabal in a post-Cold War setting. Mobutu's men are today on the receiving end.

Food for all?

Food production in sub-Saharan Africa is less now than it was 30 years ago, and food aid is at its lowest in 20 years. Can this week's World Food Summit help, asks **Mariz Tadros**

"Food for all" is the motto of the World Food Summit which started yesterday in Rome and whose target is the 840 million people going hungry today. As heads of state gathered to discuss ways of cutting this number by half by no later than 2015, time is running out for more than 80,000 children in eastern Zaire who will die by the end of this month if food and fresh water do not reach them on time.

"Intolerable" is the word used in the Rome Declaration on World Security to describe the lack of basic foodstuffs for many of the world's poor. The declaration was approved by participating governments before the summit. "We pledge our political will and our national commitment to achieving food security for all," the governments represented at the summit affirm in the declaration. There is no mention, however, of an economic will to supply food aid. Prior to the summit, the United States had objected to a statement in the declaration which asserted that the right to food is a basic human right, fearing that it might be used to demand more aid.

In the end, the US consented to its inclusion, although the summit message delivered by the head of the US delegation, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, hinted that there should be no strings attached. "We will continue to provide support to those countries that take the necessary steps to promote their self-reliance," he said. In 1994, the US contributed merely 0.15 per cent of its gross national product to development assistance, falling behind both other developed nations and its own aid target figure of 0.7 per cent.

"The prospects for future food aid are hardly reassuring," said Jacques Diouf, the director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation. Only during the food crisis of the early 1970s were food aid supplies as low as they are likely to be in the late 1990s. In a paper on food aid prepared by the World Food Programme for the summit, it is noted that there has been a drastic decline in the supply of food aid, including, for instance, a drop from over 15 million tons of cereals in 1992-93 to around eight million tons in 1994-95.

Sub-Saharan Africa, which is suffering from a decline in domestic per capita production, high fertility rates, natural disasters and sporadic fighting displacing thousands of people, has been a major recipient of food aid. The fact that food production is largely dependent upon annual rainfall in the area restricts local diets to low-yielding coarse grains such as maize, millet and sorghum. Recent dry periods mean that sub-Saharan Africa produces less food today than it did 30 years ago. Since 1970, the number of chronically undernourished people in the region has more than doubled to over 200 million, or more than 40 per cent of the population. Behind the Western rhetoric of agendas promoting "sustainable development" and "effective market strategies", the message for countries with low incomes and food deficits and for non-government organisations (NGOs) is abundantly clear: the days of relief food aid are over. A case in point is the continued decline in European Union food aid grants to Egypt. In 1986 170,000 tons of cereals were delivered; by 1991 the figure was down to 110,000 tons and further dropped to 100,000 for 1994 and 1995. Recently, the European Commission laid out a "new food aid management policy" which required the "use of food aid as a fundamental element of development policy, in particular of the long-term food security policy."

Since the EU only hands out food assistance to NGOs whose head offices are based in one of its member states, only two NGOs in Egypt are eligible — Caritas and the Catholic Relief Agency. Moreover, the NGOs must prove that all food supplies are incorporated into wider projects of a "development character."

This sounds fine on paper, but it is a different story on a grassroots level. They establish criteria which must be strictly adhered to and they don't realise that their infrastructure is very different from ours," declared Magdi Gargas, co-director of Caritas in Egypt.

Caritas has incorporated food aid into several development projects, including the Food for Work scheme, which benefits 2,000 young graduates cultivating the newly reclaimed desert land of Nubariya, 85km south of Alexandria. Food assistance has also been used as an incentive to attract the unemployed to vocational training.

However, Gargas points out that there is a significant number of hungry people who cannot participate in such development projects and who tend to be the most marginalised, such as the elderly and the sick. Caritas has had to abandon many programmes designed for them because they do not meet the EU criteria. "We don't do welfare," they say, but these people need proper meals, too. The programme must be more humane," said Gargas.

While food aid may be beneficial to the poor, it has been very detrimental to the interests of African farmers, argues Mohamed Idris, chairman of the African Farmers Union and vice-president of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers. "Food aid may be life-saving in emergencies, but at the end of the day, it has cost us an arm and a leg," he complained. "It has distorted our consumption habits. For instance, we used to consume maize, but with the introduction of wheat under food aid programmes people switched to eating wheat, which is not always available. Domestically grown crops cannot compete."

African farmers should, Idris suggested, be supported by research into high-yielding crops, a diversification of crops grown across the continent and a greater allocation of funds for agricultural development.

The World Food Programme argues in its paper for the Rome summit, on the other hand, that the limited introduction of food aid in areas "where chronic under-nutrition co-exists with weak markets that are characterised by erratic supply and wide price fluctuations" may not necessarily have a negative impact on the local agricultural market.

In any case, for the chronically undernourished in the world's least developed countries, as well as the most marginalised in countries going through periods of transition, a menu of self-sufficiency development recipes devised by the developed world will not save them from hunger today.

Bhutto in the dock

OUSTED Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will face corruption charges that may bar her from running for political office in the upcoming February elections, her successor said. Interim Prime Minister Miraj Khalid told journalists that Bhutto faced "all kinds of charges" and that he would appoint a corruption committee to investigate politicians, including Bhutto and her husband, Investment Minister Ali Zardari, who has been detained.

President Farooq Leghari dismissed Benazir Bhutto on 5 November, accusing her of allowing police hit squads to operate, closing her eyes to corruption and tampering with the judicial system. The president replaced her with Khalid and scheduled elections for 3 February, nearly two years before Bhutto's term was due to expire.

The Bhutto administration is the fourth government to have its term abruptly terminated since independence. Although Pakistanis in general do not defend Bhutto's record, they question the undemocratic methods used to oust her from power and dissolve her government. The Independent Human Rights Commission last week called for the repeal of the constitutional provision under which Bhutto's government was dissolved.

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Bypassing revolution

Yeltsin convalesced after a successful heart operation, and angry Russians took to the streets to commemorate the 1917 Revolution and protest appalling socio-economic conditions, writes **Falza Rady**

Following his successful quintuple heart bypass surgery on Tuesday 5 November, Russian President Boris Yeltsin was already up and alert on Thursday morning, sitting on his hospital bed and even walking around his room. "The president's heart, which a few months ago was working to 20 per cent of its capacity, was back to normal," wrote the British daily *The Independent*.

Yeltsin's chief medical consultant, Michael DeBakey, the US pioneer of heart surgery who performed the world's first successful bypass in 1964, advised Yeltsin to undergo surgery, predicted that he would be a "vigorous" president and could go home to convalesce in two or three weeks. DeBakey said that the president was recovering rapidly and would soon become a "new man". Clearing Yeltsin of the notorious alcoholism charges that made him the butt of political cartoonists the world over and played his re-election campaign, DeBakey claimed that he had examined the president's liver and found no traces of excessive drinking. Commenting on the American surgeon's recent high-profile media exposure in Russia, *The Independent* wrote, "Dr DeBakey appears to have become an unofficial Kremlin PR man."

Seemingly buoyed by his medical team's much-touted show of confidence, Yeltsin did not wait long before regaining full control of the presidency. Exactly 23 hours after relinquishing his executive powers to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin reinstated himself as president from his hospital bed in the intensive care unit of Moscow's prestigious Cardiology Research Centre. In reference to Yeltsin's hasty reappearance on the political scene, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov deplored the fact that "this spectacle of [Chernomyrdin] as a one-day president has made us a laughing stock in the eyes of the world community." "The speed with which [Yeltsin] re-crowned himself bears the fingerprints of his chief-of-staff, Anatoly Chubais," noted *The Independent*, adding that Chubais had become immensely influential during Yeltsin's long disappearance from public life and engineered the temporary transfer of power. After the 23-hour interlude, both Yeltsin and Chubais regained control of a country their opponents say is "as sick as the president's heart used to be."

Intent on somehow maintaining a firm — if ailing — grip on power, Yeltsin re-

fused to let a medical commission evaluate his fitness to govern and started issuing presidential decrees as early as 7 November — the date marking the 79th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution. In line with his traditional anti-Soviet distastes, Yeltsin tried to lay claim to the day and displace its symbolism by changing its official title from the Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution to the Day of Accord and Reconciliation. "We are one people. We have one fate, one future. And we are all coming from one past," said Yeltsin in an appeal to the nation released by his press service. "It is time to close the book. We have one Russia, and we must be united." "The state-controlled television reinforced the thrust of the decree with a heavy-handed dose of propaganda on the evening news broadcast," observed *The Washington Post*. A hastily patched-up "historical" commentary on France, Germany and Spain suggested that revolutions and the social upheaval they cause should be relegated to a "few handsome monuments". The patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexei II, also endorsed Yeltsin's decree, declaring, "This is just what we need right now, to bring people together, to bring generations together." But Zyuganov angrily dismissed Yeltsin's token effort at national reconciliation. "It's useless to reconcile people by decree," he snarled.

Despite Yeltsin's attempt to "close the book" of Soviet legacy, it appears that this particular book will not shut so easily. On 7 November, hundreds of thousands marched throughout Russia — as well as in other countries of the former Soviet Union — in commemoration of the revolution. In Moscow, where more than 25,000 people marched to the city centre, Zyuganov accused the government of impoverishing workers and turning the country over to the mafia. "The present powers are agonising and unable to govern," he told the cheering crowds. In the Ukraine, thousands marched through downtown Kiev and laid wreaths at the city's only remaining prominent statue of Lenin. Ukraine's reformist pro-Western government excluded 7 November from the list of public holidays last month, but the communist-controlled parliament overruled the government and reinstated the holiday. And in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, several thousand communists celebrated socialism in defiance of a city ban.

Two days earlier, on 5 November, even

stronger waves of marches and demonstrations shook Russia — events generally ignored by the media, which focused instead on the technical details of the president's bypass. Millions of workers took to the streets in response to a call by the Federation of Independent Unions for a one-day nationwide general strike to protest the 10 per cent unemployment level, social service cuts, unpaid public sector wages and pensions amounting to a total of \$8 billion.

According to the organisers of the action, some 15 million people rallied nationwide — paralysing traffic and bringing life to a virtual standstill in all major industrial centres. In the largest and most militant labour mobilisation since the 1992 protests over the transition to a market economy, rallies were held from Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk on the Pacific, to Barnaul in Siberia, Samara on the Volga River and Bryansk, in western Russia. The Russian Coal Workers Union reported that as many as 460,000 miners across the country joined the strike.

"Daily life in Russia has become nightmarish," writes Russian sociologist Ryszard Kapuscinski. Since Yeltsin's market reforms replaced the socialist planned economy in 1992, the manufacturing industry has been practically wiped out. Although the International Monetary Fund cried victory when inflation dropped from 1,500 per cent in 1992 to 200 per cent in 1993 and a projected 30 per cent this year, poverty is rampant. Its signs are inscribed on the dilapidated apartment buildings, on people's drab and worn-out clothes and on life itself.

The mafia controls the country and "has penetrated the highest levels of government," explains Kapuscinski. A recent case in point was when Anatoly Chubais, Yeltsin's top aide, engineered the appointment of a shady entrepreneur and media magnate, Boris Berezovsky, to the powerful Security Council. Berezovsky is a man notorious for his shady business deals and mafia connections. Even members of Chubais' own party, like deputy Sergei Yushenkov, denounced the dubious appointment of Berezovsky. "I am amazed that people like him are appointed to such posts — people whose guilt has never been established, but never denied either," Yushenkov told AFP news agency. At last week's mass demonstrations, a trade unionist described the rampant political corruption in more blunt terms. "We live under a government of occupation," he said.

Quebec, one year on

Quebec is reeling under the burden of budget woes and ponders a partition plan drawn up by Ottawa in case the province secedes, writes **Jooneed Khan** from Montreal

Want a difference a year makes. On the evening of 30 October 1996, the day before Halloween, Quebec Province shook Canada with a self-determination referendum which nearly pushed the country's unity over the brink.

Two weeks ago, as children dressed up as little monsters were doing the rounds of trick-or-treating, Lucien Bouchard, the separatist premier of Quebec, was in a downtown Montreal hotel with 75 business, union and community leaders, trying to hammer out a new social contract to erase the province's \$3.4 billion deficit by the year 2000. Students walked out of the second summit on the economy and unemployment in eight months after the government rejected their demand for a freeze on university fees. On the opening day of the summit, thousands of unionised workers, jobless and students demonstrated on the street below, and a small angry group even burned an effigy of the premier.

With Canada's restless French-speaking province reeling from the social and economic impact of \$2.25 billion in cutbacks over 1996-97, 12.6 per cent unemployment (1.8 million jobless and part-time workers), a drop of \$355 million in tax revenue and a shortfall of \$1.7 billion in projected private and public investment from 1994 to 1996, Quebec's "national question" has been overshadowed by the "social question". Schools, hospitals, local governments, people on welfare, women fighting for pay equity and university students burdened with heavy loans are all saying they cannot absorb any more cutbacks. Deficit reduction is good for Quebec's credit rating on the money markets, say happy business leaders; but it is increasing poverty, union and community leaders shout back.

The need to tone down deficit reduction and start fighting poverty has found a powerful voice in former Premier Jacques Parizeau, the economist who led the separatist forces to a slim defeat in last year's referendum. "We cut; expected revenues fall. We cut again; they fall again. I believe that by taking on too much, we affect the health of the economy," he wrote in an article entitled "Who Are We? Where Are We Going?" and published on the anniversary of the referendum in the small but influential Montreal French daily *Le Devoir*. "We must take care not to hurt ourselves or our cause or remove hope from those whose future depends on it," he added.

Parizeau, who resigned as premier last January, also takes his successor Lucien Bouchard to task on the "national question". "The government now talks only rarely of Quebec sovereignty [which] continues to be attacked but is not defended, [and] popular support is falling in the polls," he wrote. Indeed, three different polls conducted last month showed federalists leading separatists by between three and 10 points. But the pollsters pointed out that Quebec's population of seven million (83 per cent of whom are Francophones) is not necessarily warming up to Canada; it is rather becoming cooler about Premier Bouchard's deficit-fighting agenda.

Noting that Bouchard "wants to make peace with Anglophones, especially Anglophone business people," Parizeau writes, "I myself tried too often... Last year's referendum greatly clarified mat-

ters: 61 per cent of Francophones voted "yes". It isn't unanimous, but in a democracy one must be wary of unanimity... As for the 17 per cent of non-Francophones, nearly everyone voted "no"... It's entirely understandable: they prefer to remain a part of the Canadian majority rather than become a minority in Quebec."

This Anglophone minority has become more vocal and radical over the past year. Taking his cue from Stephane Dion, the new federal intergovernmental affairs minister, whose credo is "If Canada is divisible, so is Quebec," Howard Galganov, a small businessman and former Jewish defence League activist, has emerged as the champion of Quebec Anglophones frustrated by the apparent federal powerlessness in the face of provincial laws favouring French. This is much to the delight of Canada's English media, which rejects Ottawa's Plan A, aimed at getting the other provinces to grant Quebec a veto on future constitutional change and a "distinct society" clause recognising its Francophone character (French language, Catholic religion and civil code).

The partition of Quebec in the event of a referendum-based unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) is being called Canada's Plan B and is aimed at scaring the separatists — although it is the Francophone federalists who are getting nervous. It would allow areas of the province voting "no" in a future referendum — this would include the west of the island of Montreal, and native Amerindian and Inuit "homelands" — to separate from Quebec and remain Canadian. Plan B also calls for undermining any future UDI by asking the Supreme Court to rule on whether the results of a Quebec referendum can override the Canadian constitution and charter of rights, a step already initiated by an ex-separatist lawyer and which is now backed by the federal government. It is thought that a good many of those who voted "yes" in last year's referendum did so to press for change within Canada rather than to back secession.

Moderate Quebec Anglophones, who are the majority within the community, have been dubbed the "lamb lobby" and shunted aside. A prominent symbol of this lobby, Joan Fraser, was squeezed out as editor-in-chief of the Montreal *Gazette* after it was taken over by Conrad Black, whose Hollinger Group owns the *Jerusalem Post* and the *London Telegraph*. The Francophone Daniel Johnson, leader of the Quebec opposition Liberal Party, is under attack from the "partitionists"; though a federalist, he favours "distinct society" status for Quebec.

Quebec society is in a process of "soft federalisation", dividing along ethnic lines, two Francophone sociology professors warned last week in an op-ed piece in *Le Devoir*. An economist colleague of theirs writing in a separate publication warned against big business pressure on the government to adopt the US-style neo-liberal ideology now sweeping the globe. "Basing themselves on the dominant reductionist economic discourse, in which the human being is merely an instrument for economic growth, the bosses' lobby wants to subtract a billion dollars from the taxes on salaries and capital," he said.

Others talk of a more ominous polarisa-

tion. Galganov predicts "civil war" if Quebec opts for a UDI. He travelled to New York City in June on a much publicised mission to "warn" Wall Street bankers and investors about the risks of doing business in Quebec. The trip was a flop; only one businessman showed up and he was kicked out for talking to the media. But Galganov managed to catch the ear of a minor US congressman, Tom Campbell of California, who arranged a House of Representatives committee hearing on the implications for the US of a possible break-up of Canada. Among the participants were Congressman Dan Burton, co-author of the Helms-Burton Bill on Cuba which aims to subject foreign countries to US legislation, and Canadian affairs specialists from US think-tanks, one of whom, Charles Dorn, wrote an article in the September-October 1996 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine examining various scenarios in the event of a "Balkanisation" of Canada.

Reacting to Galganov, Jacques Villeneuve, a convicted terrorist of the former Quebec Liberation Front, which placed bombs in mailboxes in the wealthy English Montreal suburb of Westmount in the 1960s and kidnapped a British diplomat and killed a Quebec cabinet minister in 1970, talked of coming "bombs and Molotov cocktails between federalists and separatists". He also denounced Jews for their "inexplicable hostility towards Quebec sovereignty." To confuse matters further, the Toronto-based *New World Order Intelligence Update* accuses David Rockefeller's Council for the Americas and Trilateral Commission of "planning the break-up of Canada" to suit their agenda of a continental union which would hand over Canada's "multi-billion dollar storehouse of raw materials, minerals, natural resources and fresh water to the globalist elite for nothing."

As Quebec heads into its sobering polar winter, however, Premier Bouchard can be pleased that his summit on the economy and unemployment ended on an upbeat note, with a consensus of sorts among the participants: a blueprint to generate \$2.6 million in new investment (\$2.1 million in private funds), create 76,900 new jobs over the next three years (in part through job-sharing), bring the provincial jobless rate closer to the national average of nine per cent, provide financial support for families (though this depends on negotiations with Ottawa), and generate a \$250 million anti-poverty fund over three years through a new \$1-\$2 tax on weekly pay cheques. Deficit reduction remains paramount, but the government promises not to cut welfare payments to the poorest 20 per cent.

On 31 October, French and English writers from Quebec held an unprecedented bilingual cultural evening in a downtown Montreal bar to celebrate the city's uniqueness and counter Plan B by breaking the nasty pattern of ethnic-linguistic polarisation. A most welcome initiative no doubt, but one which won't stop budget cuts nor dislodge the deficit-fighting priority nor indeed put to rest Quebec's "national question".

The writer is the senior international editor of the Montreal-based *Le Presse*.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

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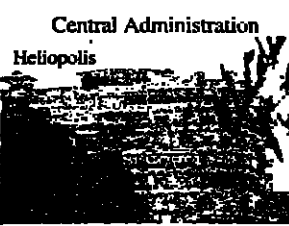
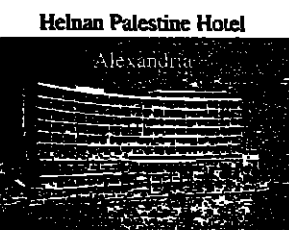
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Al-Ahram Weekly

Get AIPAC out of the White House

As Clinton launches his second and final term in office with a few congratulatory handshakes and nods to such movers and shakers as the American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), who made his re-election possible, it may also be a good idea to shake hands with the long-stalled peace process.

Contrary to what he may like to believe as true, resolving the Hebron dispute is not necessarily the key to successfully concluding the peace process. Hebron is not merely a troublesome hurdle that must be overcome. It is a key indicator of the fundamental mistrust and intransigence that has plagued the brokering of peace in this region from the outset.

Of this, Clinton should take careful notice if his second term in office is to be more productive than his first. As such, AIPAC should not be allowed to speak for the US, or for the other participants in peace. In other words, the last thing that the Middle East peace process needs is another band of Zionist zealots undermining any past, present or future agreements.

To successfully conclude the peace process on terms agreeable to any and all parties involved, a large measure of understanding, compromise, cooperation and dedication is required. This means that if the Netanyahu administration is unwilling, or does not see fit, to build a lasting and comprehensive peace on the groundwork already laid out, then as a key partner in peace, Clinton must intervene. However, standing in the way of this mediation is a problematic paradox: How can he appear to be sympathetic to the Netanyahu administration without appearing to be a closet AIPAC member?

The answer, sadly, is that he cannot. For the Arabs, the implications, therefore, are obvious. They must depend on one another, stand firm, united and committed to their goals and values.

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A time of openness

The prime minister has done much to change the image of the government in the minds of the people, writes Ibrahim Nafie.

The perception of the state as an "oppressive tax collector" has no place in the new, candid atmosphere



funded in instalments over three successive years, in accordance with the ruling issued by the Supreme Constitutional Court and in affirmation of the government's commitment to the rule of law and its reverence for the verdicts of the nation's courts.

The government has further abided by its pledge not to impose or raise taxes unless such measures fully comply with constitutional rulings, to immediately restore any moneys that have been collected in contravention of the law, and to penalise officials responsible for breaches.

Indeed, the government has undertaken a comprehensive restructuring of the taxation system, touching virtually every vital domain and covering an enormous distance in restoring the public's confidence in government integrity and equity. Of course, it can do much more to consolidate this trust and channel it toward what should be every government's aspiration: to instill the firm conviction that people are being treated fairly and, in turn, to inspire a sense of initiative and dedication in the service of society and the nation. But the directives the political leadership gave to the government of Kamal El-

Ganzouri represent a sincere attempt to live up to the correct concept of government: to serve the people and to achieve social justice.

The government's concern for checking the pulse of popular opinion is one way of achieving these aspirations. In this respect, El-Ganzouri has been following the lead of President Mubarak, who, throughout his presidency, has met frequently and regularly with journalists, writers and political party representatives in order to exchange views and to respond to their questions with frankness and sincerity. The wisdom of this democratic course has inspired El-Ganzouri to initiate a series of meetings with leaders from the opposition parties, writers and the editors-in-chief of the press, with the aim of maintaining open channels of discussion with the representatives of public opinion.

The new, candid atmosphere encouraged by the prime minister is particularly essential during this phase, marked by the formulation of a new press law. Those on the drafting committee are keen to ensure that this law affirms the right of journalists to have access to the primary sources of information. Only then can we avoid the specula-

tion that gives rise to groundless rumours. As long as we have the means of practicing our profession with integrity, officials, regardless of rank, should not complain when questioned eagerly by the press: ours is a function vital to society — to keep public opinion abreast of what is happening in the country.

Many members of our profession have already observed a significant change in the climate now that journalists have been guaranteed the right of access to information and press offices have been established in every ministry and major government organisation. The wave of spurious reporting based on unconfirmed information which had beset the opposition press has also ebbed, and the gloom and pessimism largely dispelled.

President Mubarak remains the model for the standards of openness to which both the press and government organisations should aspire. His preference for frankness stems from the firm conviction that dissimulation only leads to rumour-mongering, suspicion and baseless acrimony.

I was delighted, therefore, to see El-Ganzouri acting in the same vein. The prime minister, after all, is a statesman rather than a technocrat or administrator. He must meet with the people and remain constantly receptive to public opinion as he transmits his government's policies. He must respond to accusations and different points of view with reasoned argument substantiated by fact. These characteristics are embodied in the spirit of national understanding which the government of Kamal El-Ganzouri has come to represent.

There may be some differences of opinion between the government and the opposition over a few important issues, but the atmosphere on the whole has laid the foundations for dialogue and joint participation in the quest for common ground. In this spirit, we urge El-Ganzouri's government to scrupulously follow up on the actions it has taken, in order to ensure that they are fully and precisely implemented, and to leave no openings for government employees to obstruct the achievement of its higher aspirations.

Between Netanyahu and history

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions whether President Clinton can use his second term to carve himself a place in posterity as the man who challenged Netanyahu and achieved a breakthrough towards permanent peace in the Middle East

Following Franklin Roosevelt's election to a third term during the exceptional conditions of World War II, it was decided that from then on an incumbent American president could run for only one further term, that is, serve a maximum of two terms. Thus freed from the need to curry favour with various groups in order to improve his chances at the polls, a second-term president can concentrate on earning himself an honourable mention in the history books by bringing off a difficult task successfully.

Haunted by Whitewater and other scandals which were a central issue in his Republican rival's election campaign, President Clinton is particularly interested in having his name linked to some outstanding historical accomplishment during his second term. Although when he first ran for president foreign policy was not one of his priorities, he quickly learned that, for an American president, devoting considerable time and effort to crises situations abroad is unavoidable.

Soon after taking office, Clinton found himself involved in trying to solve many such crises. Of these, the Arab-Israeli conflict acquired particular importance because of the political returns it yielded, both domestically and internationally. Hence Clinton's keenness on having both the Israeli/Palestinian Oslo Accord and the Israeli/Jordanian peace treaty signed under his sponsorship on the White House lawn. Hence too his insistence that the Cairo Economic Conference be held on schedule, in a clear signal, at the most critical moment of the US presidential elections, that the Middle East peace process is still alive despite Netanyahu's systematic obstruction of the bilateral track.

There is no reason to suppose that the peace process will not continue to figure just as prominently on the agenda of Clinton's second term. How successful he can be in using it to make political capital will depend to a very great extent on his ability to develop a better

working relationship with the Israeli prime minister. For Netanyahu cannot forget that Clinton backed his Labour rival in the last Israeli general elections and that, adding insult to injury, he called on all the Arab states attending the Sharm El-Sheikh summit to support Pines against him. This could explain why Netanyahu ignored Clinton's call for an implementation of the Hebron redeployment agreement before the US presidential elections. But now, barring accidents, the two men are the decision-makers in their respective countries until the end of the century.

On the basic issues, Clinton had good reasons to prefer Rabin and Pines to Netanyahu. By giving the impression that the peace process was moving forward despite the vicissitudes on the way, the Labour Party team responded to the American strategic imperative of not allowing its concern over ensuring Israel's security and survival to clash with its interest in ensuring the stability of Gulf oil. Conversely, Netanyahu's uncompromising attitude on Israel's security which, in his view, takes precedence over the issue of peace, is bound to destabilise the peace process and expose the oil region to convulsions.

Another argument Clinton can raise is that by refusing to comply with the "land-for-peace" principle, Netanyahu is not only embarrassing the US administration but violating Security Council Resolution 242, the very cornerstone of the US-sponsored Madrid peace process. Armed with such arguments, Clinton can insist that, regardless of how Netanyahu feels, the current Israeli government must honour the commitments previously assumed by the Israeli state. In this logic, there is no justification whatsoever for Netanyahu not to implement Israel's agreement on the redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron.

The question is, however, whether Clinton is prepared to bring pressure to bear on Israel. Although in his current and final term in office

he is theoretically immune to pressure groups, including the Jewish lobby, matters are not that simple. For example, the next Democratic candidate for Clinton's seat is almost certain to be Vice-President Al Gore, who is known to be even more pro-Israeli than Clinton. If for no other reason, Clinton cannot be totally immune to pressure from the Jewish lobby.

Moreover, Clinton's personal convictions on specific issues are identical to those of the Israelis, and are bound to place him on a collision course with the Arabs during the critical final stage of the negotiations. To begin with, there is the emotionally-charged issue of Jerusalem, which symbolises the spiritual dimension of the conflict. Clinton believes the Holy City should be Israel's capital, however shaky the legal arguments on which that belief is based. Although he opposed the resolution passed by Congress last year to transfer the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, it was not an opposition to the principle of relocation, but to the timing, which violated the provisions of the Oslo Accords ruling that the status of Jerusalem would be addressed during the final phase of the negotiations.

The other issue on which Clinton is unlikely to accept any compromise is that of Israel's nuclear arsenal, which has so far been kept totally outside the negotiation process. Without declaring it openly, Washington, like many other Western capitals, believes Israel has a "moral" right to possess the ultimate weapon, on the grounds that it is the only state on earth whose very right to exist is called into question. With Clinton's position on two of the main points of contention between Arabs and Israelis virtually indistinguishable from that of the Israeli government, it is highly questionable that he can go down in posterity as the man who succeeded in achieving a historical breakthrough towards permanent peace and stability in the Middle East.

On ethics

By Naguib Mahfouz



I firmly believe that ethics, at both the individual and societal levels, are of the greatest importance, since morals are the basis of good faith and successful social intercourse. Those living in a society which cares for ethical values such as generosity, a sense of honour and truthfulness, feel secure and safe. But if one finds oneself among people who do not consider ethical conduct important, one has no confidence in anyone, and feels unable to have any dealings without witnesses and documents, because nobody is to be trusted.

No society can exist without an ethical base. When contaminated food is unloaded onto the market, or when buildings collapse, we have proof of deteriorating moral values in society. We may think transactions are based on laws and regulations, but these are merely devices for putting ethics into legal terminology. In the last analysis, transactions are based on ethics.

People in many eras have looked back with nostalgia to a more moral past. It is natural for people to feel this way, but it is in fact more a reflection of the difficulties they have in dealing with their present reality, than a realistic indication of society's decline. It is interesting to note that some Ancient Egyptian papyri were found to contain personal letters in which the writer complained about the deteriorating morality in his era, compared to that of previous generations. After all, the past is the recollections of our forebears, and we tend not to remember the pettiness, the dishonest transactions, but only recall the good and the wonderful things that will not be a burden to us.

We must not, however, forget the economic factor. In moments of economic crisis the pressure on morality is much greater than in times of plenty. Dire economic straits are a great test of morality, and man is, after all like a day-half is in daylight and half is kept in the dark. People generally show one side and hide the other. When circumstances change, the other side appears.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Al-Mussawwar: "Although the economic conference will centre mainly on economic cooperation, following the advice of several delegations calling for 'a lot of economy, and little politics', its results and the poor harvest that the Israeli delegation may reap could be a form of pressure on Netanyahu's government, whose policies on peace render investment in Israel a risky gamble." (Mahmoud Mohamed Ahmed, 8 November)

Al-Ahali: "It is not a question of whether the economic conference should be held on time or postponed but one of how the antagonists should approach peace in the region. Should it be through the economic door or the political one? They have differed over this and it is unlikely that they should meet unless one side covers its eyes and enters through the wrong door." (Amin Howaidi, 6 November)

Al-Arab: "They want an alliance of businessmen to dominate and rule, an alliance of the left to talk and chatter and a military alliance to guarantee security and stability: Israel's security, and US economic stability (as well as European). To confront this we must upbraid the total Arab boycott of Israel and realise that negotiation under these conditions means total surrender — acceptance that our land has been lost and Jerusalem annexed; a surrender to Israeli supremacy." (Galal Aref, 11 November)

Al-Wakef: "What will happen at the economic conference will be a struggle between political forces, even if the mantle is economic. Thus the discussions should address the political and economic independence of the nations of the region and not of only one well-known state. This is not a pessimistic view but we must uphold our interests first and foremost." (Abbas El-Tarabishi, 11 November)

October: "The Egyptian Chambers of Commerce Federation has decided to boycott the economic conference due to Israeli participation despite its being held on Egyptian soil and at Egypt's invitation. It is clear that the federation is fighting the wrong battle on the wrong soil. We should all stand as one man inside the conference whose participants hold the keys to the world's economies and will decide in a matter of hours who is the 'dark horse' to lead the region economically. I believe that we are totally capable of carrying out that role after the accolade we have received both politically and economically." (Mohsen Hussein, 10 November)

Conference challenges

Al-Gomhuriya: "Israeli intransigence in denying legitimate Arab rights destroys the confidence that has been achieved and makes economic cooperation between the relevant sides in the peace process very doubtful. Therefore, we are confident that those attending the economic conference will do their utmost to push the peace process forward, particularly since many of the participating nations have reaffirmed that the free debating atmosphere of the conference will be beneficial in boosting the peace process." (Editorial, 10 November)

Al-Ahram: "This conference should be a resounding Arab success in suppressing signs of 'Neo-Nazism' in Israel. Many observers believe this is possible if the Arabs and their friends agree to be the main force enabling the conference to achieve results which will break the fetters shackling the peace process." (Zakaria Nelli, 9 November)

Akhbar Al-Yom: "Israel's participation in the conference and the lack of confidence of other delegations in cooperating with it will convince the Israeli public that Netanyahu's anti-peace policies have had an adverse effect on the Israeli economy... I am, therefore, amazed at those who vehemently oppose Israel's participation in the conference and who even oppose holding the conference in Cairo!" (Ibrahim Saada, 9 November)

Al-Shaab: "How can anyone say that the economic conference is not a political one? Despite its name, this is first and foremost a political conference. Can the lifting of the boycott against Israel be anything but political? And can opening the doors of cooperation with it be anything but political?" (Adel Hussein, 8 November)

Al-Ahram: "The economic conference is our opportunity to present a new image of Egypt to the world — our new laws, our incentives to investors, etc. It is an opportunity to attract investments. There is a battle over investments the world over and we, with our economic reforms, should not let the opportunity slip from our hands. There should be agreements to implement projects in Egypt bearing in mind that conditions are perfect for the Egyptian economy." (Issam Elgadi, 11 November)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



Benazir Bhutto's is the face of a woman who insists on defiance in the face of adversity. Her features are delicate, but this fragility is belied by the steady gaze of her wide-open eyes. I depicted her with one hand raised, the fingers poised in a gesture of resoluteness which underlines the determination of her expression.

مكتبة من الأصل

Close up

Salama A. Salama

The leopard's spots

The Arabs are forever expecting change to come from other nations, other people. They seem to expect the new Clinton administration to come up with new policies designed to bring pressure to bear on the Netanyahu government, obliging it to follow the straight path trod by Peres, which the Arabs thought would lead to a true peace with Israel.

Most European observers, however, consider that the new American administration's policies will not fulfil these Arab hopes. Rather, they believe that the margin of change the new administration can opt for in Clinton's second term is very slight indeed. This despite the fact that Clinton no longer needs to bow to the pressure groups he had been obliged to satisfy during his electoral campaign because he is forbidden by law from running for a third presidential term. But the electoral results in Congress and the Senate, assuring a Republican majority in both houses, will force Clinton to tread a middle path, and means he will have to be open to middle-of-the-road solutions that are acceptable to the Republican majority.

This applies not only to domestic, economic and social policy, but to foreign policy as well. Clinton will be obliged to maintain policies which have failed dismally, beginning with the Middle East and the Irish problem, and extending to US-European relations, in which numerous rows have broken out, threatening US claims to world leadership. Despite the fact that foreign affairs played little part in the electoral campaign, in Clinton's victory, the campaign nevertheless had a negative effect on most foreign affairs issues, and on America's image to the world. The American administration stopped pursuing any action that might assist the Middle East peace process, and settled for merely hoping that it would carry on, overcoming its own inertia.

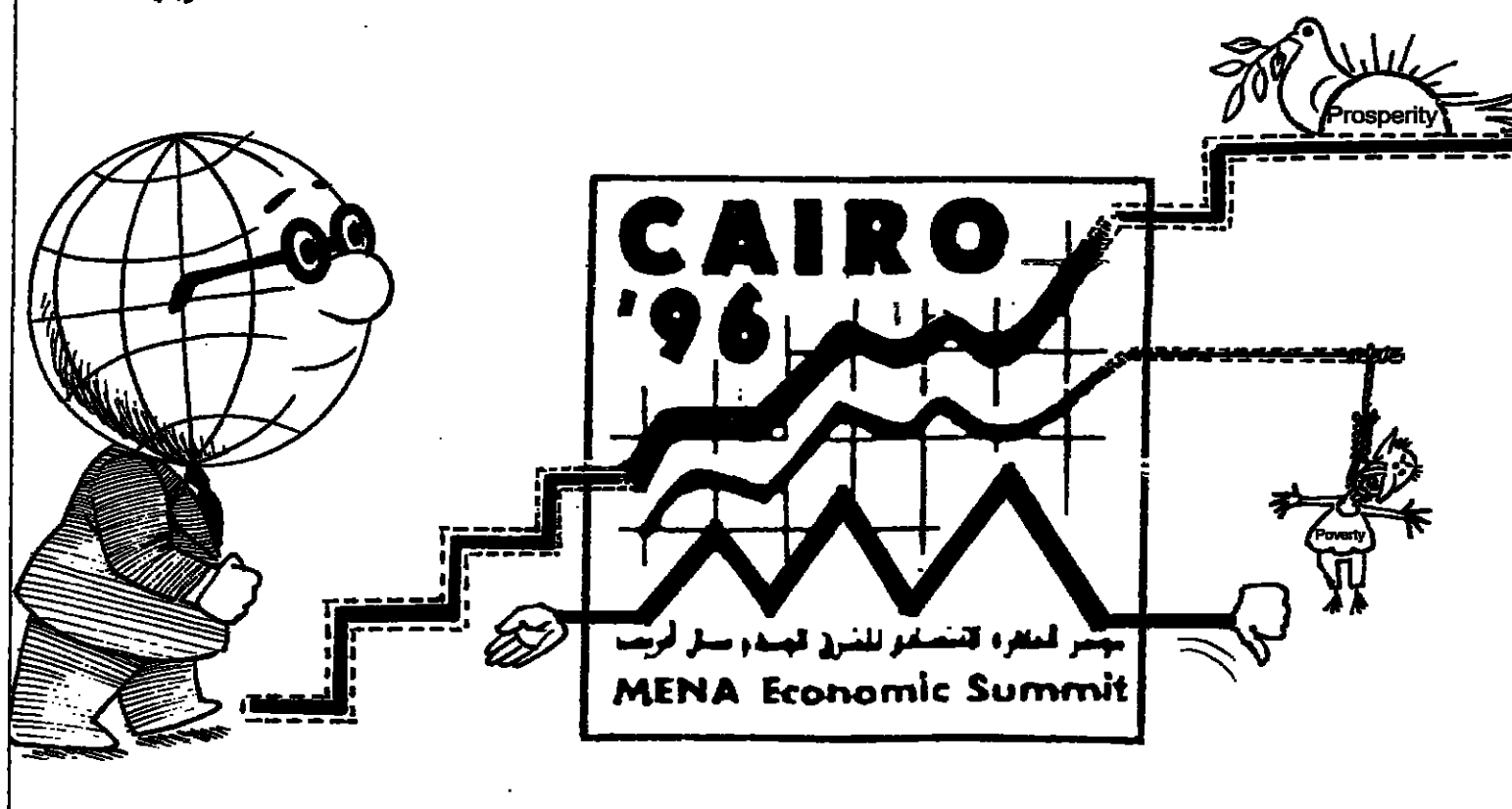
European observers do not feel that Clinton's reelection will do much to increase American ability to change the Netanyahu government's negative stand. The *Jerusalem Post* declared that, of all the US presidents, Clinton had been Israel's greatest friend.

The US's inability to be a real force for change is behind the European Union's feverish efforts to play a bigger role in the Middle East, and in a number of other issues that effect directly their interests. In the Balkans, in Russia, in the expanding NATO, in the United Nations and in the bloody ethnic conflicts in Africa. In all these issues there are divergences between the US and Europe, which Europe tries to smooth out within the framework of the Western alliance, while avoiding a head-on collision with the United States.

With the approach of the year 2000 and the EU's determination to complete the trappings of European unity, including the creation of a single European currency, there are more reasons for European-American tension in numerous economic and political spheres. The beginnings of tension appeared with the divergent positions in dealing with countries such as Cuba, Iran and Libya, with links to a certain extent, and in taking advantage of Sino-American differences.

As regards the Arab world, the real issue is the way to cope with these variables: not by cheering, applauding or inciting, but rather by formulating policies that are flexible enough to deal with all the parties concerned, and to profit from the constant differences in interests and objectives. The apparent weak spot at present is that — with the possible exception of Egypt — the Arab nations cannot take full advantage of an international situation that resembles quicksand, and continue to stick to their fixed policies, which cannot cope with the rapid changes affecting international situations. Changes which, as we have seen, have altered the direction of the peace process from one day to the next and thrown many Arab countries into greater confusion than ever before.

Comasla



The paradox of MENA

A regional free trade agreement, writes Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, amounts, at this stage, to an Israeli bid for regional hegemony. First things first: Arab cooperation is not an impossibility

Globalisation and regionalisation constitute the two central tendencies governing the world economy today. These two phenomena constitute a dual challenge for firms and governments in developing countries, raising as they do the spectre of a more rapid decline in national economic policy autonomy. According to Charles Oman of the OECD, regional arrangements and pacts could be the outcome of one of two processes.

The first of these could be a political process — in other words, a *de jure* process driven by political forces and leading to *de jure* regional arrangements among governments. The second could be a *de facto* economic process, driven by microeconomic forces that tend to promote a gradual *de facto* regional integration via the strategies and behaviour of firms and other economic agents, even in the absence of *de jure* regional institutions.

Ultimately, a process of *de facto* regionalisation will be accompanied, as things mature, by *de jure* regional arrangements. The problem in the Middle East remains: which comes first? Here it is a matter of "political feasibility", rather than pure "economic feasibility." In Asia, for instance, the move towards greater regional integration remains largely a *de facto* process. Leading Asian economists like Ippert Yamazawa argue that differences in levels of development, in stages of industrialisation and in resource endowments militate against integration along the lines of the EEC model.

At the heart of the intellectual debate in the Arab region today is the advisability of regional and subregional arrangements involving Israel in a post-peace settlement era, notably a Middle Eastern Free Trade Area.

While many Israelis are ready to trade land for peace, the content and contours of such a "peace" seem to be tailored to suit a sort of "economic Zionism" or "high-tech Zionism", constituting a major departure from the old siege mentality. Shimon Peres, Israel's ex-prime minister and a leading strategic thinker, has spoken in his famous book, *The New Middle East* (1993), of a new regional system in which Israel might become the commercial and financial capital.

While there is a good deal of optimism in Western writings and reporting about the prospects of "peace economics" and the substantial economic gains associated with the new peace dividend, not all Arabs look to the horizon with such ardent optimism.

The familiar formula of "using Israel's sophisticated technology with high-quality Arab labour" conceals the future dynamics of restructuring the division of labour within the region for the benefit of the Israeli economy. A Harvard study, entitled "Securing Peace in the Middle East: Project on Economic Transition" (1993), did not conceal this fact, as it admitted that establishing a "free trade area" in the region for goods, services and capital will open up enormous opportunities for Israel. A "free trade area," it said, "will not only eliminate the old Arab boycott but allow the Palestinian entity and Jordan to become Israel's economic doorway to the Arab world, just as Hong Kong is the doorway to mainland China."

Fortunately, Professor Stanley Fisher (formerly of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) sees "no realistic prospects of Middle East-wide regional integration on either the NAFTA or EC models in the near future." He only envisages more limited moves towards economic cooperation in functional areas such as water management, and agreements on regional infrastructure that will facilitate trade in the region.

It seems quite clear that the model of regional cooperation and integration among EEC countries cannot be easily transposed to (or imitated in) the Middle East, for a host of political and cultural factors. A long transitional period of confidence-building is required to eliminate the roots of decades of intense conflict. Moreover, partner countries in any regional cooperative scheme need to cross a certain "threshold" of similarity in their economic and

strategic objectives before any partial surrender of national autonomy can take place.

This process must occur in a smooth and voluntary fashion, thus excluding the subordination of any Arab country to exogenous rules or to the strategic preferences of another regional power. Otherwise, any "forced" regional solutions or projects will run the serious risk of political unacceptability and unsustainability.

A gradual and more cautious approach to economic regional cooperation in the Middle East is likely to yield more tangible, irreversible results, and would ultimately enhance the process of development, democracy and stability in the region, while duly respecting the Arabs' aspirations to progress, interdependence and integration.

To be realistic, the only practical and workable regional arrangement in the medium term is to establish multi-country functional sub-systems in vital areas of immediate relevance to the livelihood and progress of the people in the Middle East.

One such sub-system could be a water regime designed to ensure equitable sharing and efficient management of water resources in the region, transcending individual country boundaries. The joint management of the Jordan Basin is a matter of urgency, as the water resources are very unequally shared between the parties. Israel absorbs currently more than 23 per cent of the total sub-regional resources.

An environmental protection sub-system designed to put an end to the process of environmental degradation and to devise common environmental policies, rules and regulations to combat trans-national pollution is another possibility.

Such functional schemes would be beneficial to all participating countries, in that they would reap immediate and tangible benefits while generating significant positive externalities for all. In contrast, any more global scheme of regional integration would result, at this stage, in a "hegemonic" position for Israel within the new geopolitical and economic arrangements.

Many of the regional multi-country projects relating to the new peace economics also entail an uneven distribution of benefits and burdens among countries of the region. For instance, the impact on the Arab economies of the diversion of oil shipments from the Gulf area through a new proposed pipeline linking Ras Tanunna in Saudi Arabia to the port of Haifa in Israel has not as yet been explored. This project would generate substantial benefits for the Israeli economy at the expense of Suez Canal revenue. Equally, the re-routing of transit trade traffic away from the ports of Beirut in Lebanon and Aqaba in Jordan would impose serious economic burdens on both economies.

In sum, the serious long-term implications of these new regional schemes have hardly been studied at all. Even when they are contemplated, the implicit dynamic trade-offs are usually ignored for the sake of simplification. These difficulties cannot be simply reduced to a narrow economic calculus, regardless of strategic and political issues at stake.

Israel, from the outset, does not recognise that there is an "Arab economy" or an "Arab economic structure." Rather, it has built its strategic vision upon the establishment of a Middle Eastern regional economic grouping for the sub-regional economies of the Fertile Crescent (the area formerly referred to as the Levant), with no provisions for coordination or preliminary economic integration. Central to this vision is Israel's position at the centre or the "heart" of this assemblage, pumping blood to the extremities. In the final analysis, however, Israel's interest in this Middle Eastern economic grouping resides primarily in the extent to which it can use its position to negotiate for itself special and preferential economic relations with the major economic blocs among the countries of the first world: NAFTA, the European Union and South-East Asia.

This thinking has acquired particular prevalence in the strategies of Netanyahu and the ruling Likud coalition in Israel today.

Thus, to Israel (a country of the centre), the Arab world is a conglomeration of "southern nations" (or peripheral entities). Phrased somewhat differently, Israel perceives the Arab world as its "back yard" — the same role played by the South American countries with respect to NAFTA, or that of south central Europe to the EU. In other words, Israel seeks, within the framework of the "Middle East enterprise", to seize a central hegemonic position within the economy of the Arab east and its "gulf" extensions, working centrifugally outwards from a central base comprise of the Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian triangle.

It is Israel's aspiration to become the world's first "gateway" to the extensive regional "Middle Eastern market." Israel is betting on the fact that opening the Arab markets to Israeli industrial manufactures will, in turn, help lure foreign investment to Israel, as an "export platform" for "high-tech" products destined for Arab markets, with heavily reduced transportation costs. This view is substantiated by a survey conducted by CRB among trans-national companies based in Europe, the US and Japan.

In its conceptualisation of Middle East arrangements, Israel is focusing primarily on the development of human resources, in view of the absence of natural resources. It is currently investing 3.2 per cent of gross domestic product in research and development activities, with the aim of entering high-tech industries and moving away from the low-skill, low-tech industries, or so-called "T-shirt industries." Towards this end, Israeli policies are geared toward attracting direct foreign investment, particularly from major international electronics firms, so that Israel can establish itself as a "bridge" over which these companies' products can pass to the larger and more extensive "Middle Eastern market" in the post-peace phase.

Indeed, Israel sees itself as well placed to become the region's major centre for high-tech industries, in view of the appropriate infrastructure it offers, particularly in terms of its human resources and technological facilities. In fact, some international electronics firms have already established branches and production facilities in the so-called Matam high-tech park in Haifa. The most important of these companies are Intel, Microsoft, IBM, Philips, Chip Express, and Net Manager, among others. In addition, the vice-president of Rockwell International alluded to Israel's perception of its role in the post-peace era in a speech he made in April 1995, and which is frequently cited in Israeli publications concerning international investments and how to attract them. He said: "Israel is industrially and geographically at the centre of the Middle East and poised to be a springboard for industrial development. Rockwell desires to play a larger role in the coming industrial growth and Israel represents a very attractive base from which to accomplish this." There are also reports that indicate that Intel and Motorola, the international micro-electronics pioneers, have invested approximately \$2.3 billion in the Zionist state as the "natural gateway" to the Arab and Middle Eastern markets.

Some Egyptian political science professors have mentioned that, half a month before the Casablanca economic cooperation conference of November 1994 was due to convene, Israel had sent a copy of the projects book it was to present in Casablanca to the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These professors took this as proof that Israel had nothing to hide, and no hidden agenda.

It is true that Israel has nothing to hide at the level of the projects they were trying to sell off piece-meal at the Casablanca conference. Plans for these projects were ready years in advance. In fact, two books have appeared in English on the subject. One of these contains a collection of in-depth studies on the regional projects on the agenda

Soapbox

MENA's winners and losers

Participants in the MENA III Cairo economic conference will calculate their success by the number and value of the deals to emerge from the conference. So it is no surprise to learn that Netanyahu told the Israeli delegation to "go and win".

With so much at stake in the economic arena, it is also no wonder that 35 international organisations and agencies are attending MENA III, and that companies have sent delegates at the highest level. This mode of thought also permeated the Egyptian businessmen taking part in the conference. With 500 members, host nation Egypt has the largest delegation; they have suggested a long list of more than 200 investment projects, amounting to around \$32 billion. The size of the Egyptian presence leads one to think that perhaps the most important consequence of the conference will be political, albeit with an economic impact. The conference has dealt a severe blow to the Israel's long-promoted image of itself as the centre and pivot of regional economic cooperation. Using this motto, Israel has attempted to persuade investors and international companies that no regional cooperation can take place without its contribution. The conference has made it clear that such cooperation can take place without Israel, because her contribution is conditional with progress achieved in the peace process, and, in the current situation, that progress depends entirely on Israel.

Egypt should be given credit for proving that Israel's image of itself is wrong. The list of Egyptian projects proposed at the conference does not include any regional projects involving Israel, even though the Egyptian government has not discounted the possibility of implementing such projects in future. Israeli businessmen did succeed in concluding a few deals, in accordance with Netanyahu's advice, but I do not believe that Israel derived as much benefit from the conference as it did from the two previous MENA gatherings. Egypt, it seems, has been the winner at MENA III.

This week's soapbox speaker is deputy editor-in-chief of Al-Musawwar magazine



Abdel-Qader Shohuib

To The Editor

A gruesome tale

Sir, I read in the *Weekly's* Suez supplement (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 7-13 November) the gruesome story of Mohamed Mahran Othman, a hero of Suez. I would like to pose some questions regarding his story.

First of all, if the British were in need of corpses for transplants why didn't they take them from the many surely available corpses?

Second, why, after flying Othman to Cyprus and stealing his corpse, did they fly him back to Egypt instead of killing him to cancel any evidence?

Third, did Othman sue the British government after the war, and if not, why? I wish the British Embassy, to which I will fax a copy of this letter, would issue a statement about this matter.

Paolo Lombardini
Zamalek
Cairo

Just a politician

Sir, In the articles "Denying the myth" by

Amina Rashid and "Twist in the tale" by Mona Anis (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 24-30 October), both writers dealt with the latest controversy over writer Roger Garaudy. I wonder why, when asked for the reasons for his shift from Communism to Islam via Christianity, Garaudy's answer was that this was no shift. In my opinion, it is a disorder of the mind. It is due to politics.

The man is a "twister" not for the sake of religion but to become the centre of attention, especially in developing countries. No doubt, thanks to being the enemy of Zionism, he built a name in the Middle East. But, his reception has not been unanimously friendly. In fact, he is neither Christian nor Muslim. During one of his lectures, Garaudy attacked some countries which forbid non-Muslim people from treading their sacred territories while at the same time they allow Americans to defend their land. What a pity! How objective and realistic Garaudy's outlook is!

We should take into consideration that Garaudy hasn't mastered Arabic, therefore how can he grasp the essence of Islam? Changing religion so easily reveals the instability of

both mind and spirit. Garaudy is not religious, he is a politician!
Zarif Kamel Halkim
English Language Teacher
El-Daher Secondary School for Girls
Cairo

Shebi remembered

Sir, I have been trying to get over Mohamed Shebi's passing away. I was one of his radio programme listeners and callers for eight years. His programme reminded me of the radio DJs we had in the States 25 years ago — he played my kind of rock'n'roll including Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry and the like.

You may think it's trivial but I have been here for 25 years and Mohamed Shebi filled a void. No one had his kind of humour or style. I will not be able to listen to the radio for some time. I don't know how he managed to host a radio programme, write film reviews and do films. Mohamed Shebi truly was a star. I hope he is free and happy now. I will miss him very much.
Valerie Ahmed
Nasr City

Liberating the mind

Sir, I realise that Hoda Sha'rawi started the liberation movement in Egypt when she returned from Rome unveiled. What would have happened if a man had returned from Rome without his trousers? The liberation of women and gender equity has nothing to do with clothes which are part of culture and not necessarily related to personal characteristics.

There are some, however, not many, women who make use of their feminine allure to achieve their ends and win certain privileges which are not available to men and yet they ask for more rights.

I am writing this letter to thank Mrs Suzanne Mubarak for taking measures in dealing with a complete understanding of the fact that there's a danger for women, of going too far in the search and pursuit of freedom and liberation without keeping a sharp eye on their special role in our Islamic world.

Some women, however, are misusing this movement. We should learn from the experiences of other countries, but not repeat

them. If we take a quick look at Egyptian society, we will discover that the Egyptian woman has surpassed any other woman in the world in obtaining her rights.
Ahmed Abdel-Ghaffar
Beheira

Ban smoking

Sir, I think it's high time for all smokers to give up smoking. I really wonder why the government doesn't ban smoking and the import of tobacco since it knows that it is dangerous to the health. Of course the answer is that tobacco companies would lose too much money.

Since the government is interested in boosting investment, it could make up for these losses by directing these companies to many other lucrative fields of investment where they can make even more profit.

Public opinion may, however, be another obstacle. The result could be serious demonstrations and rioting if the government decides to ban smoking.
Ashraf Abdel-Fattah Saad
Kafr El-Sheikh

The writer is a professor of economics at Cairo University.

'Remembered forever'

One of the guest speakers at the 6th International Cava Symposium (12-14 November), Euphrosyne Doudiadis discussed her recently published *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces From Ancient Egypt*. Drawing on both the archaeological and art-historical approaches, the book groups the portraits by provenance, thus evoking a sense of the communities from which the faces came, as well as the artistic conventions and fashions prevalent at the time.

Doudiadis will give a second lecture on 15 November, 7-30 pm, at the premises of the Foundation of Hellenic Culture, 18 Sid El-Metwalli Street, downtown Alexandria.

Right: portrait of a woman, first century AD, whose mummy bore the following inscription: "Demos, aged 24, remembered for ever". The mummy of Demos was found beside that of a child, thought to be her daughter.



Not tonight, Norma

David Blake watches a priestess fly over the rainbow on a magic flute

Concert: Inas Abdel-Dayem, flute; Inas Mustafa, Soprano; Olga Kouznetsova, piano; with Wadell Fomitsky, bass and Vladimir Afanasyev, drums; Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo, 6 November

Norma is in a mess. She's an adulterous virgin priestess with two illegitimate sons by a Roman army captain, the invader of her country, ancient Britain. She has betrayed her country, her family, her traditions, her sacred vows to God. If ever she's found out about what's been going on in the temple precincts, the resulting public scandal would be such that she would be for the sacrificial fires.

Splendid set up for one of the grandest of grand operas, loved by everyone, especially the greatest singing actresses of their age. Since about 1926, there have been 5 Normas — rare birds. Inas Mustafa must tackle Norma one day. She has most of the credentials — tall and handsome, with a large extensive dramatic voice. She's sincere and very feminine, as well as work-driven. Nature has formed her for first roles. This is the second time she has undertaken the great aria which opens *Norma*, *casta diva* — a wide-ranging, imperious and daunting experience for any singer.

This is a declaration of war against the invading Romans. Her major-general lover, unbeknownst to her, is about to ditch her and run off to Rome with her best friend, another erring priestess. Opera librettos are not kind to the armed forces. Motto: never go near a soldier, he'll leave you with the baby.

Inas Mustafa made no great thing of the stupendous dignity of the opening of the aria. It

was sung sweetly composed, like a cradle song. She managed the big gaping intervals and the coloratura with ease, if not quite accuracy. But where was Norma? This role is a Medea of a part. Mustafa can be a fine Norma if she learns to enunciate the biting word and the killing phrase. The words, again and again, carry the singer over all dramatic hurdles. If the opera was mounted locally with a competent producer, the world would observe the result. The Opera House of Cairo would hit world news, opening it to a wide, economically important audience.

Inas Mustafa might remember the martyrs of past ages and stand firm. This concert was a threesome by Mustafa, her sister, flutist Inas Abdel-Dayem and the pianist Olga Kouznetsova. The first half was mostly vocal. Norma found Kouznetsova out of scale. She sounded school marmish, out of touch with primitive magic grandeur. The rest of the pieces were openers and closers for family sing-alongs of long ago.

In *Le Rossignol*, Abdel-Dayem's flute showed the soprano what to do in the stratosphere. *O Sole Mio* was comfortable, but with no radiance in the last piece, the outburst of *Violetta*, Act I of *Traviata*. Sensitive librettos, Mustafa did not burst or liberate. She has an elemental simplicity which is good for opera but no one seems to have told her that the sing-along days of opera are over. Opera is characters, words to which music has been added — in that order. For her, it should be *prima la parole, dopo la musica*.

The second half of the concert was devoted to one huge piece advertised as a suite for flute and jazz piano. It proved to be an immense duet for piano and flute by Claude Bolling, which is set before his two

players — a monster meal. Every difficult thing for the two instruments is brought before the listener. Synopses over dating and changing, related phrases running through modulations of free associations, Dixie Land, Louisiana Jazz, Blues and forays into Viennese turn of the century atonality of sweeping



Sophia Sadek

romantic climaxes. It is in seven pieces with varying speeds, scary and prickly — haroque and blue, a telegraphic view over the entire twentieth century scene. It was word building, note destruction and, at the end, victory outside the rules of speed.

Kouznetsova let fly. She is a dab hand at these jazz modulations. Inas Abdel-Dayem, who played almost continuously for nearly one hour music of complexity and beauty, further enhanced her position as a world class flutist.

Arabic Music Festival, Main

Hall, Cairo Opera House, 9 November

Norma, the character in a mess who dominated the concert of 6 November, has little but her charisma in common with Sophia Sadek — a strange wonder from Tunis. This was her debut in Cairo, and it was an auspicious event.

She is a flame of a girl in black and white, seven foot tall, thin-boned, a figure like one of those elongated medusa-like bomb shells who exploded over Europe at the beginning of the century. You've never seen a Giovanni Boldini walking out of a painting, you may have seen this flame-like look-alike stalking the stage of the opera on the night of the 9th.

Gertrude Stein wrote that Boldini was exciting. She had a very positive reception and her gifts deserve a big career. The rest of the programme was not so much put in the shade by Sadek as politely erased. The other woman singer, Leila Ali from Morocco, who gave her own version of Umm Kalthoum's *Anta Ummi*, was decidedly not much loved by the audience. They missed the words. The playing of the *oud* throughout this section of the concert was of top quality.

The Arabic music festival has made dramatic advances since it began. And the audience is critical and knows what it hears. The performance showed the singing of the Helwan University choir to be completely up to standards set by visiting groups. They filled the Opera House with the sound that thrills, vibrant and warm. As the festival began with success, so it seemed likely to end with success.

must have 3 octaves; all of it is powerful, some of it strident, but full of presence. So, she can make a noise with it which says: I'm here, listen to me, I'm great. But she's without vanity — she's just built that way. Some listeners were knocked sideways by the voice, as the sound she made curved up stratospherically while remaining quite feminine, then dropped down a few octaves, still remaining perfectly audible. What an Electra she would make. She arrived at this concert a mystery and presumably departed so. Who taught her, where did she begin, and where will she end?

She sang songs in a ululatory manner, with titles like *Dream, My Heart be Happy*, and best of all the last, of immense length, *When the Evening Came*. She had a very positive reception and her gifts deserve a big career.

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Theatre

Up the garden path

Nehad Selaiha finds some wisdom, and plenty of madness, in an AUC production of Euripides' *The Bacchae*

Euripides is so rarely performed in Egypt that a production of any of his plays is, unconditionally, a rare treat. You can, therefore, imagine my excitement at the prospect of watching an open-air production of his *Bacchae* with the added bonus of a woman in the director's seat and a production crew consisting mainly of women. Hopes ran high and expectations soared to unrealistic and, perhaps, untenable peaks.

The choice of site was truly inspired. Instead of the Wallace, the traditional venue for most American University in Cairo productions, director Krista Scott and set-designer Julia Coash chose the fountain area on the main campus — a charming patio bordered with majestic trees, with a small fountain in the middle, and a flight of broad, white steps on one side, leading up to an elegant building with lattice windows in the traditional Islamic style. It was a mild autumn evening with just enough wind to ruffle the leaves every now and then and send the odd one fluttering down, make the candle flames flicker and send ripples through the diaphanous robes of the female chorus. The lighting enhanced the beauty

and magic of the place and the background music of traditional reed pipes and flutes which provided a kind of overture to the performance was an ingenious touch; it reminded one of the austere mountains, rugged hills, and sombre landscapes of Upper Egypt. The clay water-jugs, placed around the fountain, glistened with the water that trickled down on them and gave a rural feel. The audience sat in wicker chairs arranged in a half circle on the grass, round the paved performance space, and I felt I could sit there in perfect happiness for hours, even if no performance materialised. Coash had created not just a set, but an intensely evocative and highly poetic environment.

When the lights dimmed and Dionysus made his appearance in a thick cloud of smoke, the magic flared up to a climax, then fizzled out, and the spell was broken. Heavily made-up, in a shiny golden tunic, with

thick golden tresses, carrying the inevitable thyrsus, Dionysus (performed by Tamer Hagras) struck one as a figure out of an Xmas pantomime. Hagras delivered the prologue (in which the god outlines his plan of revenge against the house of Cadmus) in the effete manner of a cynical, decadent dandy. It was goodbye to tragedy; no genuine tragic mood could hope to exist after that. With the appearance of the chorus of oriental women (led by Nermin Amin) in their romantically seductive attire, looking more like woodland nymphs and fairies than Dionysian worshippers, and a ridiculously puny and rapid Pentheus (played by Shaun P Bourgeois), with two clumsy, bungling guards, the pantomime mood was sealed. Tiresias and Cadmus looked like two music-hall comedians, and as the performance progressed, the vengeful god came more and more to resemble an impish, mischievous Puck. Rather

than the palace of Pentheus at Thebes, the setting seemed more like the forest of Arden or the Athenian woods of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This made a mockery of the final scene in which Agave, Pentheus' mother, rushes in, in frenzied ecstasy, waving what she thinks is the thickly maned head of a lion, but which is, in fact, the torn-off head of her foolish son who had disguised himself as a woman, at the instigation of Dionysus, to infiltrate the ranks of the Bacchae and watch their orgiastic revels. It was at this supposedly tragic moment that the performance came closest to the bungling attempts of Bottom and company in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to stage the tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Saddled with the role of Agave, poor Lucy El-Kenogha did not know where to turn or what to do with the burdensome head. She delivered the ritual dance over the bloody remains of her murdered

son in neutral, embarrassed tones, as if eager to get it over with.

I half suspect that Krista Scott deliberately adopted a parodic style and modelled her production on the classical pantomime; the evidence is too great for it to be a mere coincidence. If she had meant it, it would be perfectly legitimate and quite in line with Euripides' skeptical turn of mind and his ambivalent attitude to all gods. The problem with Scott's production, however, is its inconsistency of mood: one is never quite sure how to take it and the parodic line is never quite firmly established; occasionally, the tone flirts with the tragic and earnestly serious, but as soon as you adjust to it, it swings back to comedy and burlesque. It felt as if the director was deliberately and repeatedly leading us up the garden path and pointing at once in two different directions. But disconcerting as the production was at times, and at others positively vexatious, it was never dull or unexciting. It was Euripides at his most provocative with a good measure of sophisticated wry elegance. No wonder there was so little tragic passion.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Anna Boghossian
Raghuvaran St. Downtown. Tel 383 1699. Daily exc Fri. 11am-5pm & 6-9pm
Paintings and drawings of Constantine Cavafy's house

Aziz El-Hiti
Machrouq Gallery, 4 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri. 11am-5pm

Group Exhibition
Donda Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gharib St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Bab El-Louti. Tel 335 8367. Daily exc Fri. 12pm-5pm. Until 14 Nov.

Popular Crafts
Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 335 8367. Daily exc Fri. 12pm-5pm. Until 14 Nov.

Barry Iversen
Cairo-Rabat Gallery, 17 Youssouf El-Ghazali St. Bab El-Louti. Tel 333 1764. Daily exc Sun. 12pm-5pm. Until 16 Nov.

Time magazine photo-correspondent for the Middle East, Barry Iversen displays works which capture a love of the desert.

South African Art
Gazdar Sheraton Hotel, Dokki. Tel 341 1333. Daily until 17 Nov.

Franciscan contemporary South African artists display a collection of works.

Latin American Art
Opera Arts Gallery, Opera House. Geiza. Tel 341 2926. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 20 Nov.

Gamal El-Saghi (Paintings)
Raghuvaran St. off El-Mahmoud St. Zamelok. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun. 10.30am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 22 Nov.

Farid Fadel (Paintings)
El-Hamra, Opera House Grounds. Geiza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 24 Nov.

The Court Photography of Rind Chhabra
Savoy Gallery, Main Campus, AUC. El-Shekh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. Daily 9am-1pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 27 Nov.

The 7th Student Art Exhibition
East Gallery, Main Campus, AUC. El-Shekh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Fri. 9am-5pm. Until 28 Nov.

Art education from paintings and drawings executed by AUC art students in 1995-96.

Elizabeth Boudier-Abdelhak
Savoy Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 331 4362. Daily exc Sun. 10am-2.30pm & 3pm-5pm. 18-29 Nov.

Adly Elmaghaly (Watercolours)
Donda Gallery, 4 Mohamed El-Louti St. Downtown. Tel 334 7951. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 7 Dec.

Animals in Egyptian Art
Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Fri. 8.30am-7pm. Sat 12pm-5pm. Until 30 Dec.

The Museum of Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed Mahabib
Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Mon. 10am-5pm.

Capitole Museum
Main Campus, AUC. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri. 9am-4pm. Fri 9am-11pm & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Fri. 9am-4pm. Fri 9am-11pm & 1pm-3pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Mon. 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm.

Mahmoud Naghi Museum
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghazali St. Geiza. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Mon. 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm.

Mahmoud Naghi Museum
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghazali St. Geiza. Tel 337 5436. Daily exc Mon. 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm.

Legends of the Fall
El-Hamra, Opera House Grounds. Geiza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 24 Nov.

French Film
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4224.

Thérèse Raquin (1953). Directed by Marcel Carné, starring Simone Signoret, Jean-Claude Brialy and Juliette Mayniel. 14 Nov. 7pm.

Les Contes (1959). Directed by Jean-Claude Brialy and Juliette Mayniel. 20 Nov. 7pm.

French Cultural Centre, Mounira an-Nasr, Helwan. Tel 354 7679.

Kil Kil (in Arabic with French subtitles). Directed by Derwaz Abdel-Sayed, starring Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, Ashraf Moubar and Aida Riad. 19 Nov. 7pm.

Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 24 Nov.

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Raghuvaran St. off Mohamed Mahmoud St. Downtown. Tel 337 5436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 24 Nov.

DANCE

National Folkloric Ballet of Mexico
Main Hall, Opera House. Geiza. Tel 341 2926. 14 & 15 Nov. 8pm.

Modern Dance
French Cultural Centre, Mounira an-Nasr, Helwan. Tel 354 7679. 17 Nov. 8pm.

MUSIC

Les Marionnettes de Nantes
Gomhoury Theatre, Gomhoury St. Tel 341 2926. 14 Nov. 11am. Performing *Le Vaillant Petit Tailleur*.

National Arabic Music Ensemble at Mounira an-Nasr, Helwan. Tel 354 7679. 17 Nov. 8pm.

Egyptian Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House. Geiza. Tel 341 2926. 14 Nov. 8pm.

Les Melodistes Ensemble
Gomhoury Theatre, as above. 15 Nov. 8pm.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Nov. 8pm.

Great Symphonies II
Gomhoury Theatre, as above. 16 Nov. 8pm.

Les Marionnettes Lapt-Torino
Gomhoury Theatre, as above. 16 Nov. 8pm.

Musical Youth of Egypt
Small Hall, Opera House, AUC. El-Shekh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. 16 Nov. 8pm.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 Nov. 8pm.

Abdo Magher Ensemble
French Cultural Centre, Mounira an-Nasr, Helwan. Tel 354 7679. 16 Nov. 8pm.

Sahil Instrumental Concert
Small Hall, Opera House, AUC, as above. 20 Nov. 8pm.

Yehia Yehia and his ensemble
blend oriental music with Turkish and Hindi rhythms.

THEATRE

El-Moharraq (The Buffoon)
French Cultural Centre, Mounira an-Nasr, Helwan. Tel 354 7679. 17 Nov. 8pm.

El-Tayeb el-Wakeel (The Ring and The Bracelet)
El-Tayeb el-Wakeel, as above. Tel 337 5436.

Mamlouk El-Zab (The Captain of the Ship)
El-Tayeb el-Wakeel, as above. Tel 337 5436.

El-Ghazali (The Gypsy)
El-Tayeb el-Wakeel, as above. Tel 337 5436.

Bella (Femina)
El-Tayeb el-Wakeel, as above. Tel 337 5436.

El-Ghazali (The Chain)
El-Tayeb el-Wakeel, as above. Tel 337 5436.

LECTURES

Coptic Apocalypses from the Arab Conquest to the Mamluk Period
The National Library for Arabic Manuscripts, 12 Mohamed El-Louti St. Downtown. Tel 340 6861. 14 Nov. 5.30pm.

Early Travellers in Egypt
British Museum, 190 El-Nil St. Agouza. Tel 331 0319. 16 Nov. 7pm.

Lecture by Harry James, co-keeper of the department of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum.

Euro-Mediterranean Relations: An Arab Perspective
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC. El-Shekh Rihan St. Tel 337 5436. 18 Nov. 5pm.

Lecture by Nassef Hitti, Iraqi Yehia and Richard Smith, professors of Political Science, AUC.

Islam and the Western Civilization
Oriental Hall, as above. 19 Nov. 6pm.

Lecture and forum (in Arabic) by Mounira an-Nasr, Helwan. Tel 354 7679.

Lecture by Beverly Jensen, assistant professor of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Around the galleries

GLASS works by Zakaria El-Khennani and sculptures by Aida Abdel-Karim are on show at the Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation. The 40 glass works revolve around three thematic axes: the earth, the sea and the sky, draw on ancient mythologies and are technically accomplished. The 13 sculptures in a variety of media also take nature as their thematic starting point, but in these nature is formalized rather than mythologized.

The Spanish Cultural Centre, Alexandria, plays host to black and white drawings by Esma Dawestashi, exhibited under the title *Diwan Khayalat Fingon El-Qahwa*. With figures of animals and human resembling the figures that appear in a Turkish coffee cup that has been turned over in order to be "read" by a fortune teller, these are meant to shift the onus of signification away from the image itself and onto the spectator.

Satama! Gallery affords a glimpse of early works by renowned painting artists: academic oil paintings by Effat Nagui, portraits and landscapes by Mohamed Nagui and Youssef Kamel, expressionist scenes from popular life by Ragheb Ayyad, portraits by Ahmed Sabri and landscapes by Mahmoud Said.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashry

مكتبة من الأصل

At home with Constantine Cavafy

In two exhibitions, running concurrently in Cairo and Alexandria, and in a forthcoming book, to be published in France by Fata Morgana, Anna Boghigian has been busy portraying the elusive world of Cavafy. Nigel Ryan spoke to the artist about what seems, to all intents and purposes, an ongoing concern

This week sees the convening of the 6th International Cavafy Symposium in Alexandria, an annual event that has, in its relatively short history, firmly established itself on the city's cultural agenda, attracting participants from across the globe. Last week also saw the opening of an exhibition of artworks by Anna Boghigian, based on the life and work of the Alexandrian Greek poet, which will continue at Espace, in Cairo, until 21 November. In addition, and to coincide with the symposium itself, the same artist will be exhibiting at the Cavafy Museum in Alexandria, showing works based on the apartment in which for close on three decades Cavafy lived and worked, the apartment that now houses the museum bearing his name. And included in the Cairo exhibition are a number of works that will form the core of an illustrated but very limited edition of selected poems by Cavafy, planned for early spring by Fata Morgana, France's leading publisher of artists' books.

There is, apparently, no getting away from Cavafy, certainly not for Anna Boghigian, who has spent much of the past year on work connected to the poet. Not that she is the first artist to find Cavafy's oeuvre inspiring — a great many have, including David Hockney, who produced 14 etchings to illustrate poems, published originally in a limited edition in 1966 by Alcott Press, and the New York based Egyptian painter Ahmed Morsi, a series of whose prints, *Cavafy Suite*, was widely exhibited in Egypt several years ago. Yet Hockney's etchings, whatever else their merits, really do not seem to have very much to do with either Cavafy or Alexandria — the two are, after all, inseparable — and the character who wanders through his series of prints often looks less like the fastidious, slightly precious Alexandrian than a sixties business man, leaping, flapping, tie, hair just a little too long. Ahmed Morsi too appears, at least in his *Cavafy Suite*, to have been less interested in the details of either poems or life than in capturing something of the mood of the unique city to which Cavafy gave such elegant voice. Hence the smoking stube, the smoking across so many of the prints, more often than not pursued by a house that may or may not be Bucephalus. And when he does tackle imagery that might conceivably be drawn from Cavafy's own poetry, it emerges in Coptic-style sketches, pensive sailors looking wistfully out to sea, very Quercy of Brest and a stab at the kind of homo-eroticism that Cavafy would probably have avoided like the plague. His *guyana*, after all, were not inhabited by Arnold Schwarzenegger look-alikes.

Anna Boghigian, on the other hand, attempts a far more solidly based reconstruction of the unseen inhabited by Cavafy, using his own house as a starting point for a great many of the pieces shown in the Espace exhibition, and for practically all the images that will be contained in the Fata Morgana book. Not that her approach is in any way documentary, the house on Lepsius Street, now Sharm El-Sheikh Street, is practically empty of furniture. All personal items are long gone, and only photographs remain to fill in the gaps. Boghigian's, though, is a far more convincing rendering than that undertaken by either Hockney or Morsi.

When documentary evidence proves sparse, photographs unavailable, the artist draws on the wealth of detail provided by the poems. Her aim, after all, is not one of archaeological reconstruction, or even of illustration, but to produce images that at once complement both the text, as she reads it, and the kind of life Cavafy led, as understood in her reading of the poems. The details Cavafy himself provides can at times be exhaustive, since the poet was often himself attempting a reconstruction of the distant and more recent past.

"This room, how well I know it... The couch was here, near the door, a Turkish carpet in front of it. Close by, the shelf with two yellow vases. On the right — no opposite — a wardrobe with a mirror. In the middle the table where he wrote, and the three big wicker chairs. Beside the window the bed where we made love so many times. They must still be around somewhere, those old things"

It is from such a wealth of details that Boghigian takes her cues, inserting two yellow vases, or a Turkish rug, into the images she is making, an oblique reference to one or another poem.

It is a painstaking process that can result in no definitive statement but a series of equivocal, working images that can be altered as desired, as readings of the poems change and the understanding of that most fugitive of entities, a life, becomes clearer or else fades. Yet it is a process that has kept Anna Boghigian fascinated for almost a year.

Her interest in Cavafy though began, she says, much earlier.

"I became aware of him first, I suppose, when I was

18, but only as a fictional character. And then later, in the stories and early seventies, when I travelled in Greece, I began to think about him more, and read his poems again. And then I discovered that certain images he regularly used seemed to relate to my own life, and my own travels, and his evocation of Greek history, of Ionian civilization in southern Turkey, say, was very like my own experience of southern Turkey."

This perceived overlap in experiences encouraged Anna Boghigian to begin to attempt to trace not so much the biography of the poet but the sources of those experiences that might have resulted in the poems, an apparently tentative endeavour but one which has, finally, resulted in two exhibitions and a book. From Greece and southern Turkey she returned, naturally, to Alexandria, since it is Cavafy's life in Alexandria, his everyday experiences, that inform the poet's own reconstruction of the Hellenistic world. She first visited the Cavafy Museum when it was still a hotel, having been shown the building by Madame Christina, proprietor of the Alexandrian restaurant the Elita, and one of the few people remaining in the city who still remembers Cavafy. And as luck would have it she stayed in the room which, later she was to discover, was the poet's own bedroom. Images of this room, and the view from its window, feature prominently in the exhibition at Espace, drawn from both memory and made in situ, earlier this year, when she spent several months sketching in the museum.

If there is something slightly obsessive in all of this — looking into the Hotel Amir, hardly the most salubrious of establishments, simply to feel closer to the man, sitting for weeks on end in his bedroom, endlessly drawing the same bed, the same window, the same rug — then perhaps this is what is necessary, for Cavafy was himself something of an obsessive. He was a man of routine, a man whose footsteps could be traced because, according to Boghigian, "he lived in a triangle, following very set patterns. Every day, in the 26 years he lived in Lepsius Street, you know he walked to his office, in the Ministry of Irrigation, a site now occupied by the Metropole Hotel, following the same route down Sharia Sultan Hussein and Safiya Zaghloul. You can follow the route, and when you come across a tobacco shop, you can believe that it is the tobacco shop about which he wrote. [They stood among many others/ close to a lighted tobacco shop window/ Their looks met by chance/ and timidly, haltingly expressed/ the illicit desire of their bodies/ Then a few uneasy steps along the street/ until they smiled, and nodded slightly...] Whether it is the tobacco shop or not doesn't matter. It might be, and that is important."

The thing about Cavafy, Boghigian insists, is that the



Images of home: "Time's gone by quickly/ since nine o'clock when I lit the lamp and sat down here. I've been sitting without reading/ without speaking. Completely alone in the house, who could I talk to?"

actual details, the penicillarity, quotidian biographical bits and pieces, do not really matter. He was too fastidious to be mired in the insistently everyday, and his poetry, even his most explicit poetry, is far from confessional.

"Instead of letting things be a one-night stand, a quick pick-up, he wanted them to be poems, and he made them so poems. And it all happened in his apartment. So one should not be crude in deriving the erotic element of his poetry. It was, after all, a subtle eroticism, and it is not restricted to just those poems with an obviously sexual

content. It runs throughout his work, and I hope throughout my paintings."

Thus, the God abandons Antony not in some recreation of the Ptolemaic city, but beneath the balcony of a hotel room of the Hotel Amir. It is from the bed in this room, appropriately enough the largest piece of furniture in the Cavafy Museum, that "the voices/...the exquisite music of that strange procession" can be heard, and it is from this window that Antony bade farewell to the Alexandria he was losing.

bouche, and dresses the whole thing in a khedival uniform. The ancient and recent pasts collide in a single image that insists on the personal, and contemporary, relevance of the poem.

Sometimes, of course, the approach is more illustrative, more textually driven, and there are pieces included in the current show that happily cite the poem they are intended to accompany. For *Ammonis, Who Died at 29, in 610*, is one such piece, though significantly the poem of the title ends with the following quatrain: "Raphael, your verses, you know, should be written so they contain something of our life within them, so the rhythm, so every phrase clearly shows that an Alexandrian is writing about an Alexandrian." And thus it is with this artist's whole approach to Cavafy — an Alexandrian who writes always about an Alexandrian, always, though by no means directly, about himself.

Anna Boghigian describes her own paintings, based on Cavafy, as an attempt to synthesise the peculiar mix of past and present, of history and personal memories, of life and poetry, that Cavafy made his own. The pictures constitute an attempt to define the boundaries of an imaginative world that refused the crude dictates of chronology, preferring instead to enmesh the present in that past of which it is a part and to dignify experience by refusing, with perfect manners, any claim to distinction, any pretension of uniqueness. The images themselves can at times be dense, working perhaps a little too hard to incorporate too much in too small a space. At their best, though, these paintings manage to encapsulate the elusive world that Cavafy himself inhabited, a world demanding peculiar descriptions. These Boghigian provides, and in doing so solidifies her own obsession into a very real achievement. "Cavafy," she insists, "can be read in many ways — back through adolescence, in youth and in old age. There is something very Homeric about him — he is a traveller, a voyager, through time and space."

The story, as a consequence, is unlikely to end here.

All quotations from Cavafy's poetry are taken from *C P Cavafy, Collected Poems*, translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, Chatto and Windus, London, 1984.

For details of the Espace exhibition, see Listings opposite. A second exhibition of paintings and drawings by Anna Boghigian will be shown at the Cavafy Museum in Alexandria (4, Sharm El-Sheikh Street), from 14 to 25 November; for more information, call the Foundation of Hellenic Culture: (03) 4821598.

Plain Talk

I have participated in all kinds of festivals, but, I must admit, I have never attended a festival of literature. This is why I was intrigued to read about the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, which took place last month.

The festival coincided with my visit to England, and though it was not on my tightly scheduled programme, I followed its activities closely. Cheltenham is a town in Gloucestershire which, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, the sponsor of the festival, is a spa town inhabited mostly by retired officers. It figures in a number of novels by Victorian writers such as Thackeray and Trollope, the latter using Cheltenham most memorably as a setting for *The American Senator*.

What is truly revealing is the fact that despite of technological development in communications and the availability of a push button retrieval system, the Cheltenham Festival still attracts tens of thousands who flock in to watch and listen to their favourite writers. It seems that nothing can really replace face-to-face communication. For the authors, the festival is not only an appropriate venue for launching a new book, but also gives them immediate access to the responses of their readership.

Going through the festival programme I was awed by the diversity of novelists, satirists, comedy writers, crime and detective writers and so on. Refreshingly, an entire session was devoted to cookery books.

The festival focused this year on women authors and their work, and some of the issues that came up for discussion were "What ever happened to feminism?" and "Is there such a thing as women's fiction?" One critic confidently asserted that we look at history through woman-tinted spectacles and glean rare insight from women's accounts of wars, travel and the stresses of family life. Among famous women writers who attended the event were Jilly Cooper, Antonia Fraser, Doris Lessing and Ruth Rendell, while their male counterparts included Stephen Fry, Julian Barnes, John Mortimer and Harold Pinter.

Beside the personal testimonies, a number of general lectures were given. The famous theatre actress Fiona Shaw gave the annual Shakespeare lecture, while Cambridge professor Gillian Beer discussed George Eliot. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Beer is only the third woman in 28 years to give the lecture — "an imbalance that calls out to be redressed."

What characterised this year's festival was the organisation of what one might call "theme days", in other words days devoted to specific subjects. There was a day for comedy writing as well as a history day.

An interesting event was one that explored the relationship between paintings and books, featuring a debate between the artist Tom Phillips, the art connoisseur George Melly and Hilary Spurling who is working on the life of Manet. In this context Beryl Bainbridge, a novelist and painter, talked about her novel and last painting, both inspired by the fate of the Titanic.

One thing worth mentioning here is the festival-within-a-festival for children where not only books were shown, writers gave talks, but workshops for aspiring children writers were held. There were over 30 events for children, including puppet shows and more conventionally, party games.

A festival I can only regret not having attended, the Cheltenham Festival of Literature appears to be yet another piece of evidence that whatever technology brings us in the way of communication, there is nothing like the printed word.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Among the cities

Drifting Cities, Stratis Tsirkas, tr. Kay Cicellis. Athens: Kedros, 1995

The re-issuing of this translation is a major event for literary people, for historians of the Middle East during the second world war, and above all for students of the literature of Alexandria. An Alexandrian Greek born and bred, the late Stratis Tsirkas has published his monumental trilogy in Athens between 1960 and 1965. A French translation won a critical prize for the trilogy as "best foreign novel" in Paris in 1971; and Kay Cicellis' tremendous English translation was issued by Knopf in New York in 1974.

That same year Tsirkas coincidentally published the second of his two important critical books on Cavafy, *The Political Cavafy*, in which he develops the thesis that the great poet was deeply interested in current Alexandrian political issues before 1911, but became disenchanted with the increasing heavy-handedness of the British Occupation. Politics is in fact Tsirkas' over-riding preoccupation, and accounts for both the strength and the weakness of *Drifting Cities*.

This title itself is not metaphorical, but political in meaning, as is crystal clear in the Greek original: it was a great ancient Hellenic poet, Alcæus, after all, who actually invented the metaphor of the ship

of state. And eloquent epigrams from the political poems of a great modern Hellenic poet, George Sefis, emphasise that Tsirkas saw himself as working, Cavafy-style, in very long ethnic/literary tradition of political commentary. The trilogy is a monument to many things, but most specifically to an era in Greek politics that most of the rest of the world has now forgotten — an era of heroism and of the best and most hypocritical intrigue, when modern Greece itself was occupied first by German, then by British troops.

Drifting Cities is in fact a tale of three cities. Jerusalem, in May and June of 1942, is the major setting of "The Club", the first volume, completed in 1960; Cairo, between December 1942 and July 1943, is the major setting of "Ariadne", the second, completed in 1962; and Alexandria, between September 1943 and September 1944, is the major setting of "The Best", published in 1965. But it is difficult to conceive of these books as in any way separable from one another. Unified by recurrent motifs, characters, and the personal stories of Manos, an Alexandrian Greek communist, of his colourful extended family, and of Nancy, the Scottish peeress who becomes his lover and collaborator,

Drifting Cities must be thought of as one single enormous work. Ultimately it is not unlike an Athenian tragedy, in which the conclusive action on stage only refers to or suggests the catastrophe taking place out of sight.

It is Alexandria, the setting for much of this conclusive action, that Tsirkas knew best. And his Greek version of Alexandria is a wonderful antidote to Lawrence Durrell's decadent and bookish "city of memory," a British-run sexual utopia from which "natives" are virtually excluded. Much more true to life, Tsirkas' Alexandria contains not only a few real Egyptians, but also working-class Europeans, and is cosmopolitan only in the sense that many different ethnic communities inhabit it at the same time, living more or less separately from one another, none of them in full permanent.

Tsirkas quotes with approval as one of his Greek



Stratis Tsirkas, author of Drifting Cities

characters recalls what he was told by Ahmed Urabi himself: "You're guests in this country. Our people have waked up, and they want to be masters in their own house. Don't be fool enough to trust the British. They try to pass as your protectors, but when they don't need you any more, they'll slip the noose around your necks and sell you cheap. If you know what's good for you, keep your eyes open. We like you, we don't mind you being here. But as guests, not as bosses."

Readers who are bored by politics, and especially by the intricacies of political argumentation or manoeuvre, may feel inclined to skim those sections of *Drifting Cities* that involve nothing else. In this regard, even one of Tsirkas' own characters remarks that "all ideologies, always, have been intolerant"; and Nancy tells Manos that his fanaticism has left him "dried out" as a lover. For literary people, on

the other hand, the trilogy offers an over-plus of technical interest. Tsirkas was brilliant in his conception of literary form and of how novels in particular work; and his varied manipulation of such ordinary instruments as point-of-view is extraordinary. He is among the tiny handful of practitioners, for example, to employ successfully and at length the second-person point-of-view, by all odds the rarest in narrative literature. The emotional effects he aims at also have their political dimension and never fail.

Their success may well be largely due to Cicellis' translation, which is impressive, with only a few obvious fumbles due to over-anglicising: it is difficult to recognise the Rue des Soudes, for example, in a location like "Nuns Street" or the *Description de l'Egypte* in a "Description of Egypt." Its substitution of some invented "sycamores" near Bab al-Khalq, on the other hand, for what should obviously be the old banyans south of Fum el-Khalig must be blamed on faulty memory in Tsirkas himself, who obviously knew Cairo far less intimately than he knew his own Alexandria.

Reviewed by John Rodenbeck

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Cairo '96 MENA Economic Conference: Planning for a prosperous future

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak opened the three-day MENA conference in which Egypt participated with a delegation headed by Dr. Kamal El-Garzou, Egyptian prime minister, Amr Moussa, the Egyptian foreign minister is the deputy head of the delegation.

The conference included seven open meetings and 30 other meetings to discuss definite topics. There was one day devoted to reviewing projects proposed by Egypt.

Money and Business provides, as a service to its readers, highlights of the summit's programme.

Tuesday, 12 November:

11.30am - 1.30pm Opening session.

4 - 5.30pm Sessions and project introduction:

* The government's role in creating an atmosphere attractive to investment.

* Growth and economic development through the expansion of industrialisation.

* Detailed analysis of the Palestinian economy.

Wednesday, 13 November:

8.00 - 9.00am Breakfast.

9.30 - 10.30am Sessions:

* The economic climate: Politics and reforms needed to create an investor-friendly environment.

11.00am - 12.30pm Introduction of projects.

* The relationship between human resources and economic policies.

* Peace and diminishing competitiveness: Business policies of multi-national companies.

* Structural reform and reform policies in the region.

* Special session for small and medium-scale projects.

3.00 - 4.00pm Sessions:

* Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

* How to make projects succeed.

* The role and competitiveness of banking.

* Special sessions for small and medium-scale projects.

* Businessmen's role in economic development in the Middle East and North Africa.

Thursday, 14 November:

8.00 - 9.30am Regional co-operation.

9.30 - 11.00am Investment, opportunities, potential, and challenges.

11.00am - 1.00pm Sessions and workshops in parallel.

5.30 - 7.00pm Concluding sessions.

Bank of Alexandria: Enhancing investment

THE CONVENING of the MENA economic summit came as a triumph for the efforts of the nation as it tries to create a favourable investment climate, attracting both local and international investors, with the goal of increasing production within the framework of the economic reform programme. Within this framework, Bank of Alexandria has implemented a successful strategic plan towards boosting the privatisation process.

This is reflected positively by offering a full range of traditional banking services, as well as innovating new services within its wide network of banks scattered throughout the world.

The bank is also founding a centre in conjunction with the Swift international network, which will convey the needs of local and foreign investors with state-of-the-art technology within its network of 180 branches located all around the globe.

Banque Misr: Investment project profile

THE MENA economic summit concluded with numerous proposals for small, medium, and large-scale projects. The bank's chairman, Essam El-Din El-Ahmed, said that the bank presented no less than 17 proposals for projects at the conference, in a wide range of fields, designed to fill the nation's needs. Below is a list of some of these projects, with their location and purposes:

- Suez Company for Cement, Ghatmia, Suez. Cement products and other materials.
- El-Wataniya for Navigation, Alexandria. Owning, buying, selling, leasing and operating vessels.
- Egyptian Workers Bank, Ma'arouf, Cairo. Banking activities for commercial and investment banks.
- Arab International Company for Hotels and Tourism, Ramses Hilton Casino and Annex Sonesta Port Said. All activities related to establishing, owning and managing hotels and real estate.
- Sakara Tourist Co "Sakara Touristic Village", 12km north of Safage City. Establishing full touristic project.
- Universal Company of Touristic Investment, 1191 Corniche El-Nil, Cairo. All activities related to tourism and hotels investment.
- El-Nile Company for Hotels and Tourism — Private Sector, Oasis Hotel, Cairo-Alexandria Road. Investment in both hotels and tourist activities.
- Ismailia Touristic Company, Ismailia. All kinds of touristic activities.
- Taba Touristic Development Co, Taba. All activities related to tourism and hotels investment.
- Al-Rowad Company for Tourism, Cairo. All activities related to establishing, owning, managing projects in tourism, hotels, touristic villages, restaurants, floating hotels, motels, entertainment, sports and recreational projects.



Essam El-Din El-Ahmed



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مكتبة من الأصل

IDBE: Promoting Egyptian industry

THE INDUSTRIAL Development of Egypt (IDBE) started activity in 1976 as a special bank. The purpose of the bank is to promote the Egyptian industry in general, the private and cooperative sectors in particular, and to provide assistance to artisans and small industrialists as well as carrying out their banking services.

Achievements of IDBE from 1 August 1976 to 30 June 1996:

— IDBE approved loans amounting to LE4.3 billion and benefited 24,691 projects

operating in different industrial sectors.

— The total investment costs of the projects financed by IDBE amounted to LE8.9 billion. These projects realised about LE2.7 billion in value added, and created 298.2 thousand new employment opportunities.

— IDBE approved loans to small-scale projects amounting to LE18 billion and accounted for 43 per cent of the loans approved by the bank.

— Total IDBE loans to projects in newly-established cities amounted to LE1.1 billion.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK OF EGYPT (IDBE)

welcomes Egypt's hosting of

more than 85 countries taking part at the MENA Cairo Economic Conference

Our range of services includes:

- Providing credit facilities for industrial projects
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IFC invests in Egypt's first leasing company

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) met with its joint venture partners in Cairo on 14 November to proceed with the setting up of ORIX Leasing Egypt (OLE), the country's first leasing company. OLE will offer lease finance facilities to industrial and other sectors of the economy, enabling small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to grow and expand their operations.

Present at the meeting were Messrs André Hovagimian, director, Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa, IFC; Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, chairman of the National Bank of Egypt, the largest government-owned, commercial bank in Egypt; Mr Adel El-Labban, chairman of the Commercial International Investment Company, the merchant banking arm of the Commercial International Bank of Egypt, the country's leading private sector bank; Mr Yoshio Ono, director, International headquarters, ORIX Corporation, Japan, the world's leading specialised leasing conglomerate and Mr Humayun Murad, managing director, ORIX Leasing Pakistan Limited, a subsidiary of ORIX Corporation of Japan.

OLE will serve the needs of a broad base of clients who require medium and long term financial leases for capital goods, including plants and machinery, office equipment and transportation vehicles. It will introduce a flexible financing instrument allowing enterprises to benefit from full financing as well as a schedule of lease payment. OLE will have a strong impact on the country's financial system by extending and improving credit delivery.

"This investment will play a pioneering role in the establishment of a leasing industry in Egypt and the development of the productive

private sector," said IFC's Mr Hovagimian. "It will also support the needs of small and medium enterprises, which are the main engine for economic growth."

The new company is expected to be capitalised at LE20 million (US\$5.9 million equivalent) and the shareholders are expected to provide long-term funding of approximately US\$15 million. IFC's financing package will consist of a loan for its own account of up to \$5 million and equity participation of up to LE3 million (US\$0.88 million equivalent) or 15 per cent of the company's projected capital.



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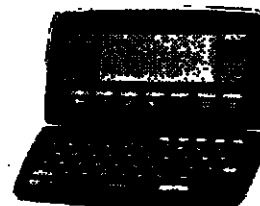
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Our activities have since expanded to meet the requirements of the Egyptian market. Recently, we have begun a joint project to manufacture medical disposables in New Borg El-Arab City. Keem Electric wishes to discuss further co-operation with other companies.

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HYMA Plastic/ HYMA Foam is considered one of the largest companies operating in the field of plastics and films of all sorts, manufactured at its factory in Giza. GSE is also a pioneering company in the same field, with headquarters located in the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom. HYMA/GSE produces lining and insulation sheets made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) according to American standard specifications at its factory in Abu Rawash, Giza, with 100 per cent Egyptian labour. The thickness of these sheets ranges from 400 microns to 5mm.

Mahmoud Ayoub,
general manager

National Bank of Egypt



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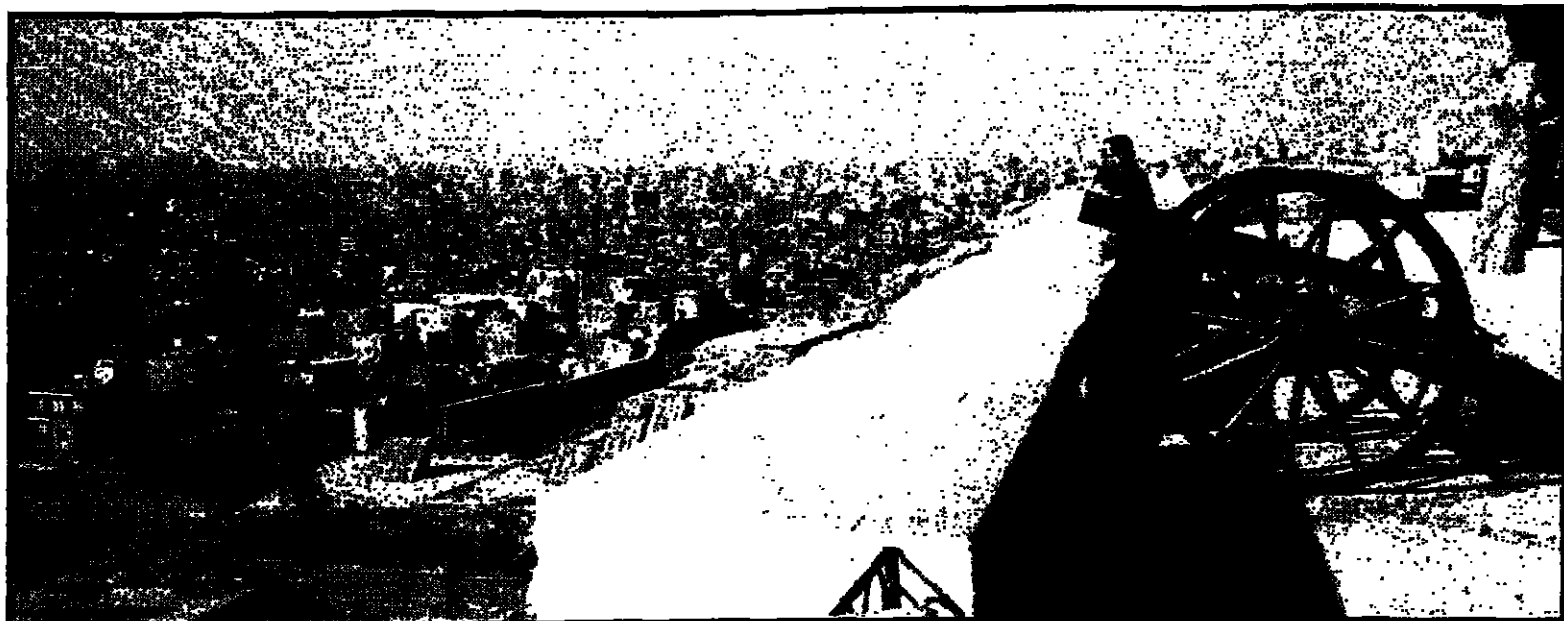
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View from the Citadel

Travellers' book guide

The Citadel revealed

Michael Stock reviews William Lyster's, *The Citadel of Cairo, History and Guide*, and puts it to a practical test

The Citadel of Cairo, History and Guide, by William Lyster, as the name suggests is divided into two distinct parts. The history section outlines Egypt's contemporary history, while the guide section takes one on a walking tour of the Citadel, pointing out the important landmarks. The book is generously and appropriately illustrated in colour and contains clear supporting maps.

The historical section of Lyster's *Citadel* is remarkable for its readability and scope. The author recounts the archaeological history of this vast and 'many layered' construction, giving detailed architectural descriptions. At the same time he describes the dynastic history of Egypt and its neighbouring states. Lyster accomplishes this difficult feat with

clarity and lucidity.

Approaching such a large and complex structure, with its convoluted layout, many museums and showpieces, is not an easy endeavour. The need to draw attention not only to what is visible on the surface, but also to what remains unseen in the past, is a challenge that might daunt a less ambitious man. Yet Lyster has done this and, at the same time, managed to incorporate some fascinating anecdotal references in his text. The result is what may be the most concise, informative and interesting history of Egypt, under Islam, available to the lay reader.

In 639 the Arab general, Amr Ibn Al-As, took over Egypt by defeating the forces of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire who, with their

predecessors from Rome, had ruled the country for almost 700 years. Along with General Al-As came Islam, and through the next 500 years its followers gradually established a series of settlements under Abbasid and Fatimid rulers that culminated in the founding of El-Qahira, the walled city which later became known as Cairo.

In 1171, a Kurd, known in the West as Saladin, arrived on the scene. After abolishing Fatimid rule, he established Egypt, first as part of the Turkish empire, and then as his own domain. To control and protect his extensive capital, Saladin ordered the construction of a massive citadel on a spur of the Mugattam hills overlooking the city. For the last 800 years, this structure, intermittently en-

larged, modified, partially destroyed and rebuilt, has dominated the skyline to the east of Egypt's capital. It survived and developed throughout the Ayyubid, Mameluke, Ottoman and French rule eras. In modern times, under the rule of Mohammed Ali and his Egyptian dynasty, the British occupation and as a present-day tourist attraction, it has retained its dignity and stature.

The Citadel of Cairo concludes with seven pages of comprehensive Bibliography, Acknowledgments, a useful Glossary of Arabic and Ottoman terminology and an Index.

The Citadel of Cairo, History and Guide by William Lyster is published by The Palm Press and is available at all major bookshops. LE30.

Putting Lyster to the test

Well briefed from my reading of the historical section of *The Citadel of Cairo*, I chose a perfect day, with clear blue skies, good visibility and warm but not too hot sunshine, and set out from Midan El-Tahrir to put Lyster's 'guide' to the test.

I knew where I was going, but how to get there was a dilemma in itself. I had not reckoned with the inadequacy of my Arabic pronunciation and the consequent inability to convey my needs to my taxi driver. Neither 'Akhdan Salah ad-Din' nor 'Midan El-Rumayla' meant anything to this man and requests for the mosques of Sultan Hassan and El-Rifa'i were met with equally blank stares. 'The Citadel' obviously was not understood and a hasty thumbing through Lyster's book failed to remind me of the Arabic word 'El-Qala'a'. But we got there eventually.

Walking up the street between the El-Rifa'i and Sultan Hassan mosques, I was pleased to see how this road has improved since it was enclosed with gates at both ends. Passing out into the midan below the Citadel, I crossed to the central pedestrian area which had been recently face-lifted with marble steps and low walls but had already fallen into decaying neglect again. I looked up at the tower structure before me and the imposing Bab El-Azab.

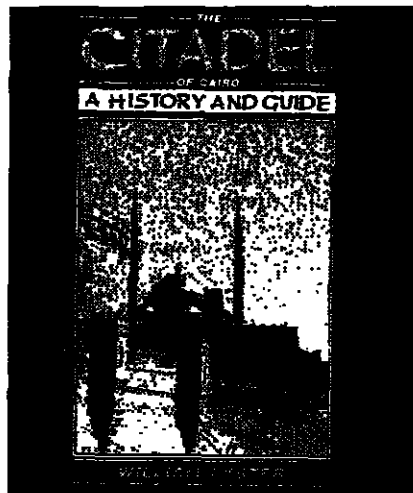
What a pity that this gate is not open! I set off to walk up the road to Bab El-Gadid — not a pleasant experience — and was disappointed to find that, in-

explicably, I could not cut off a large corner by using the steps of the Ramp Road to Bab El-Gadid due to a locked gate.

Pursuing the filthy main road, I eventually reached the Citadel entrance where, fortunately, conditions improved quite markedly. Guide in hand, I followed Lyster's route and learned something new at almost every step. The entire area within the Citadel walls has been vastly improved since I was last there. Roads are clean and free of obstructions, signs are many and accurate, the few sellers of postcards and papyrus are not over-persistent and very few young boys ask for *bakheesh*. It was, however, disappointing to find several areas, including the Cafe, Hall of Fire Engines and Military Prison closed to the public for no apparent reason. Access to the latter was only possible on 'request' for which a tip was expected.

In contrast, the staff at the Gawhara Palace were particularly helpful and non-intrusive. I was disappointed to find that Bir Yusuf, although accessible by scrambling over rubble, was firmly shut off from view. While I can understand that reasons of safety might preclude public access to the lower levels of this impressive feat of medieval engineering, a view from the upper platform, supplemented by lighting within the shaft, could be both impressive and safe.

A further disappointment, and imitation, was to find that entrance to the Northern Enclosure, containing



among other features the Mosque of Sulayman Pasha, The Carriage Museum and the early (Ayyubid) Walls, could only be obtained by paying an additional fee of LE10. What is the reason for this?

The Citadel is an impressive complex containing a Royal Palace, Military Fortress, Garrison Town and some outstanding religious architecture. It offers the best view, on a clear day, of one of the earliest foundations in the Islamic world, which has grown into one of the largest cities in modern times. To appreciate its features and its place in Egypt's history, William Lyster's book is without equal.



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Legal Status:

Shareholding Company established
under Law No. 43 of 1974 amended by
Law No. 230 of 1989.

Year of Incorporation: 1980

Fiscal year end:

March 31st

Authorized & Paid-in Capital:

LE9 million

Number of Shares:

9,000 shares (not listed on the stock exchange)

Par value/share: LE100

Company operations:

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Factory and Head Offices:
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AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT (IN LE 000'S)

Assets	Mar-93	Mar-94	Mar-95	Mar-96
NON-CURRENT ASSETS				
LAND, BUILDING & EQUIPMENT	37,038	39,185	41,658	43,951
ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION	(22,844)	(25,229)	(27,668)	(30,137)
PREPAID TAXES	765	943	918	1,210
SUNDRY ASSETS	1,038	1,143	1,085	1,712
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	15,997	15,999	15,995	16,536
CURRENT ASSETS				
NET RECEIVABLES	11,344	10,733	8,697	9,860
INVENTORY	13,757	11,758	13,991	16,910
ADVANCED PAYMENTS	594	542	683	864
CASH	5,730	6,511	2,088	11,787
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	31,425	29,544	25,469	39,421
TOTAL ASSETS	47,422	45,543	41,464	55,957

LIABILITIES	Mar-93	Mar-94	Mar-95	Mar-96
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
NOTES PAYABLE	4,797	6,216	683	11,048
ACCOUNTS PAYABLE	6,625	5,523	9,202	10,728
ACCURED EXPENSES	3,761	2,883	3,626	4,245
DIVIDENDS PAYABLE	7,889	5,653	3,673	4,191
SUNDRY CURRENT LIABILITIES	2,387	1,642	1,733	1,834
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	25,462	21,817	18,917	32,046
PROVISIONS	5,048	5,293	5,294	6,270
NET WORTH				
COMMON STOCK	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000
RESERVES	7,835	9,417	8,841	8,841
TOTAL NET WORTH	16,835	18,417	17,841	17,841
TOTAL	47,422	45,543	41,464	55,957

INCOME STATEMENT	Mar-93	Mar-94	Mar-95	Mar-96
NET SALES	67,843	58,270	61,304	78,874
LESS: COST OF GOODS SOLD	35,727	31,615	33,918	48,432
DEPRECIATION	3,062	2,049	1,943	1,987
GROSS PROFIT	29,054	24,606	25,443	28,455
DEDUCTIONS				
SELLING, GENERAL & ADMINISTRATION	17,567	16,643	20,409	26,323
DEPRECIATION	434	528	580	580
INTEREST EXPENSE	1,357	474	508	566
SUNDRY EXPENSE	455	0	0	0
PROVISIONS	1,142	0	0	0
PRIOR YEAR EXPENSE	0	58	355	0
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	20,955	17,703	21,852	33,469
ADDITIONS				
INTEREST INCOME	329	184	426	463
SUNDRY INCOME	203	0	0	0
PRIOR YEAR INCOME	0	4	60	0
TOTAL ADDITIONS	532	188	486	463
NET PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	9,728	7,091	4,117	7,449
ADD: GAIN ON SALE OF PLANT	210	154	50	0
NET PROFIT BEFORE TAX	9,938	7,245	4,167	7,449
LESS: PROVISION FOR INCOME TAX	1,949	1,612	1,496	3,338
NET PROFIT AFTER TAX	7,989	5,633	2,671	4,111

For more information please contact:

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Egypt routs Namibia

10 African qualifying matches for the World Cup were played over the weekend. The Egyptian national soccer team were the most convincing winners, outlasting Namibia 7-1. Inas Mazhar reviews the weekend's fixtures

Amidst a high spectator turn out at Cairo Stadium last Friday afternoon, the Egyptian national soccer team routed Namibia 7-1 in Group II in a one-sided game completely dominated by the hosts. According to AFP Ali Maher, a professional player in Saudi Arabia, grabbed his first goal in a hat-trick 25 seconds into the match, scoring the fastest goal of the qualifications.

Ahmed Hassan followed suit with another in the 12th minute, before Maher scoring again, sunk Egypt's third goal in the 15th minute. Namibia's only goal came in the 25th minute when Elphas Shiwute scored. Ibrahim Hassan concluded the first-half at the 35th minute by giving Egypt its fourth goal. As he began scoring in the first-half, so Maher started the second-half scoring his hat-trick and Egypt's fifth goal in the 70th minute. Veteran Ehsan Hassan, the twin brother of Ibrahim, helped himself to a couple of late goals in the 73rd, and 84 minutes to give the Egyptians their 7-1 victory over Namibia.

Tunisia confirmed that they will pose the biggest threat to the Pharaohs with a 1-0 away win over Liberia, who staged the match in Accra, Ghana. Liberia, who was to host, has been virtually destroyed by civil war.

In Group II, the next fixtures are scheduled as follows: Namibia vs Liberia on 11 Jan, 1997, and Tunisia against Egypt on 12 Jan.

Meanwhile in Group I, Nigeria struggled to overcome Burkina Faso 2-0 in Lagos despite fielding nine members of their winning Olympic team and recalling forward Rashidi Yekini following a two-year absence.

Turkish based Daniel Amokachi scored twice in

the second-half for the Group I favorites, who missed a penalty and struggled to subdue a team that packed the mid-field.

Guinea, considered the nation most capable of troubling Nigeria's Super Eagles, recovered after conceding a seventh-minute goal to defeat Giant Killers of Kenya 3-1 in Conakry. Mike Okoth, the sole professional in the team's line-up, gave new coach Reinhard Fabisch a timely boost with his decisive goal to follow up those of Aboubacar Titi Camara and Fode Camara to turn the tide before half-time.

The group's next fixtures are scheduled as follows: Kenya vs Nigeria on 10 Jan, and Burkina Faso vs Guinea on 12 Jan, 1997.

In Group III, Congo claimed another World Cup victim with a 1-0 victory over Zambia as the battle to represent Africa at the 1998 finals intensified at the weekend.

Zambia is currently ranked No 1 in Africa by the world governing body FIFA. Philomena Masinga slammed a cross into the net after 72 minutes to give the sluggish South Africans a 1-0 victory over under-strength Zaire in Johannesburg.

The group's next fixtures are scheduled to take place on 12 Jan, with Zambia vs South Africa, and Zaire vs Congo.



Hat-trick Ali Maher sweeping towards the Namibian goal photo: Mohamed Wassim

A Group IV clash saw Angola defeat Zimbabwe 2-1 in Lusitana with goals from Fabrice Maieco and Antonio Alves. Veteran goalkeeper Bruce Grobelaar, who has relinquished coaching duties to Scott Ian Porterfield saved a first-half penalty kick from Alves. Zimbabwese Adam Ndlovu, pulled one goal back with 30 minutes left and the Warriors came close to levelling in the closing stages.

Cameroon launched their challenge for a record third consecutive finals appearance with an im-

pressive 4-2 victory in Togo, where Alphonso Tchami scored two early goals. Franck Fiafwo reduced arrears after half-time only for the indomitable Lions to inflict further punishment through European-based professionals Patrick Mbowa and Jean Jacques Misse-Misse.

Cameroon faces Angola, and Zimbabwe plays Togo in the next fixtures on 12 Jan.

Ghana got a fright in Group V, before holding Gabon 1-1 in their encounter. Inspired by experienced mid-fielder Abedi Pele, the Black Stars dominated for long periods in Libreville only to fall behind after 70 minutes to a goal from substitute Theodore Nguema.

Pele, the former African footballer of the year who recently quit relegated Italian club Torino for Munich in Germany, headed the equaliser two minutes later.

Morocco struck three times within eight minutes to complete a 4-0 triumph over Sierra Leone, who were drafted in when economic sanctions forced Burundi to withdraw.

The group's next fixtures are scheduled to take place on 10 Jan with Sierra Leone, while Morocco meets Ghana on 12 Jan.

The twenty African teams were divided into five groups; each of four teams. Group winners qualify for the finals in France from 10 June to 12 July, 1998.

Rhythmic raptures

The Egyptian rhythmic gymnastics team swept the 3rd African Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship in Namibia and returned home last week with a new junior star. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

The Egyptian delegation returned from the 3rd African Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship in Namibia after triumphing in both the junior and senior events. The teams tallied up a total of 23 medals; 12 gold, 7 silver, and 4 bronze.

The junior team, which surprised everyone with a sweeping victory over Egypt's strongest rival, the South African team, featured a rising star in Sherin Karam. While all bets were on the seniors to collect the gold medal in the team event, the junior's sweep of all the individual as well as the team competition bodes well for the future.

The performance of the teams has prompted the newly elected federation board to put plans afoot to send the rhythmic gymnastics team to the world championships slated for July 1997 in France. Dr Wagdi Abul-Moeti, president of the Egyptian Gymnastics Federation declared, "Our junior team is very promising, and they proved they can bring us more medals in international competitions."

Egyptian delegation head, Salah Darwish encouraged the senior team members not to be intimidated by South Af-

rica's champion Michelle Cameron who managed to win the individual event. Egypt's Yassin Yousef collected the silver and compatriot Mai Esnat took the bronze medal. The team, slightly put off by Cameron, got their act together and won the team event, as well as first places in the individual competitions. Namibia with the bronze in the team event followed silver medalist South Africa.

Egyptian senior team member Mai Esnat snagged first place in the rope and ribbon competitions while Howaida Salama won gold in the clubs and silver in both the rope and ball events. Compatriot Yassin Yousef took the gold in the ball and shared first place with Esnat in the ribbon.

The inclusion of Sherin Karam, Dina Emad and Marwa Serag on the junior squad boosted the whole team's performance. Karam, 14, emerged as the best rhythmic gymnast in the championship, dominating on all the apparatus, and in the individual event. Her 36.150 score in the individual event of the junior's exceeded South African senior Cameron's 35.550 score. The gymnast's abilities induced Samir El-Dehawi, manager of the Egyptian Gymnastics Federation to flatly



Howaida Salama training for the African championship photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

state, "Karam is our next rhythmic gymnastics champion."

The Karam family is very active in the sport but it had never occurred to Karam's parents that Sherin, who began as an artistic gymnast, would excel as a rhythmic gymnast. "Like her elder sister Safinaz, we wanted Sherin to be the best of the artistic gymnastics team," explained her father. "When she decided to join the rhythmic gymnastics team she was de-

termined not to let us down." Karam joined the artistic gymnastics national team at the age of eight. But her light weight did not allow her to complete proper landings during routines and she suffered several injuries. For Sherin this was bad enough but after a short time, two more girls joined the team and the competition became unbearable. "Whenever there was an international competition, the elder girls were selected. They

were stronger and were able to affect a better landing," explained Karam. "So I had to join the rhythmic gymnastics team."

Her light weight, which had been a hindrance, allowed her to readily execute the most difficult manoeuvres. "Shifting to rhythmic gymnastics is the best thing Sherin did," said her mother.

In 1994 she led the national team to a gold medal in the first African Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship in Johannesburg. She won the silver medal in the clubs, and the bronze in the rope. In the 2nd championship in March 1995 she won the gold medal in the ribbon and the silver in the rope competitions. Karam was the first junior to win a gold medal in the history of the tournament at the 6th All Africa Games after she led her team to a gold medal in the team event.

With the announcement that the federation plans to send a rhythmic gymnastics team to the World Championships in France next year, Karam's parents hope she will be on the list of players going to France. "Going to the World Championships in France is Sherin's golden opportunity," said her father. "I'll do my best so that she goes to that championship even if I have to sell my car to provide her with finance."

Simply irresistible

THE UNBEATABLE Sharqia hockey team were crowned in Harare as the African Clubs champions for the ninth consecutive time. The African champions, setting a record for achieving a continental trophy for nine championships in a row, were welcomed by fans at Cairo Airport from as far away as Sharqia Governorate. Their achievement is only rivalled by six-time European champions Spain.

Handball news

THE ALGERIAN national team snatched the title from defending champions Tunisia in Benin last week, firmly locking out the Egyptian team. The Egyptian delegation, playing with their junior team, took third place ahead of Morocco. Ahli Club, will arrive in Tunisia for competition this week in the Arab Clubs Championship. Ahli rivals Zamalek Club will participate in the African Champions' Cup in Morocco next December.

Uplifting results

EGYPT'S national weightlifting team pinned down the title of the Arab Weightlifting Championship held last week in Beirut. The squad won 26 medals; 22 gold, three bronze, and one silver. Syria came in second place with 23 medals; six gold, nine silver, and eight bronze. Third place was taken by first time winners Saudi Arabia with 19 medals; one gold, nine silver, and nine bronze. The championship hosted eight Arab countries including Palestine. Egypt's Younsi Shalali, was chosen Arab champion.

Speedball

THE EGYPTIAN national speedball team captured the 11th World Speedball Championship held from 31 October to 4 November in Belgium. The Egyptian team won second behind Austria, while Austria took third. The Egyptian team, despite participating with only seven players won all the events; teams, singles and doubles, in both the men's and women's competitions.

Basketball bounce

LAST WEEK Gezira of Egypt captured the 15th African Basketball Champions Cup for the second year running. Two Egyptian teams, Gezira of Cairo and Ithad of Alexandria, took part. Five teams reached the finals in Alexandria after surviving four months of qualification rounds among 13 teams.

"Starting from the semi-finals when Gezira team beat Kenya's Coppertief 101-54 in the first leg match in Cairo," said Dr Adel Sabri, Gezira's coach, "we felt that we were both lucky and in good form to win the championship even before the second leg match held in Nairobi in July."

Tyson out

JUST WHEN Mike Tyson's — bravado intact — boxing career appeared to be on an ascending curve, heavyweight opponent Evander Holyfield set him firmly back on terra firma in Las Vegas. The surprise upset for the troubled boxer, favoured 7-1 in the World Boxing Association title bout, brought back memories of Tyson's 11 Feb 1990 defeat by Buster Douglas in Tokyo.

The 34-year-old Holyfield, whose medical fitness to take on Tyson was questioned, eclipsed Iron Mike's sun when he sent the 101kg former champ to the moon in the 11th round of a gruelling encounter.

The slugfest was halted by referee Mitch Halpern after Tyson, with the appearance of a man boxing underwater, was knocked into the ropes with a powerful right.

"He was out," said Halpern. The bout's outcome was unpredictable until the 98kg Holyfield rallied in the sixth round and gave Tyson serious trouble in the 10th before stopping him with a nine-punch barrage in the 11th.

"I'm not a guy who makes excuses," Tyson said. "He fought a good fight. I look forward to a rematch."

Holyfield, the second man, after Muhammad Ali, to hold the heavyweight title three times, earned a place in boxing lore with his 33rd victory and 24th knock-out.

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

"Egyptian capitalism without Egyptian capitalists" was a phrase that succinctly epitomised economic developments at the end of the 19th century.

With the exception of the large and middle landowning classes that grew during the second half of that century, the backbone of capitalist activity in Egypt was made up of foreigners, either those connected with European financial houses or Egyptianised Jews. The result was a banking system with a very non-Egyptian flavour. The great majority of the banking houses established in Egypt were either branches of European concerns or owned by foreign expatriates in Egypt.

Although we do not have precise statistics pertaining to the involvement of the upper landed classes in banking from the reign of Said Pasha (1854-1863) up to the end of the century, the writings of economic historians suggest that they frequently fell victim to foreign bankers.

Perhaps this was behind the limited share Egyptians had in national capitalist activities. Things began to change at the turn of the century with the creation of the National Bank in 1898, which attracted the custom of notables and dignitaries — Egypt's landed aristocracy. But the general masses of Egyptians still continued to avoid the banking system.

There were many reasons for this. In the cities, the lower and middle *effendi* classes, as the rising sectors of educated government bureaucrats were called, feared to so much as set foot into a bank, so great was their mistrust of them. The same applied to small rural landowners.

So anxious were ordinary Egyptians about the safety of the meagre savings they worked so hard to accumulate, that they were reluctant to keep them anywhere that was not close at hand. Many secreted their savings around their homes, giving rise to the popular saying "money beneath the floor tiles." This practice was encouraged by the fact that gold currency remained in use until 1899. Another option was to convert their savings into gold jewellery which would be given to wives to wear and which could always be converted into ready cash if need be.

The first reports of the National Bank tell us that the primary problem surrounding the circulation of banknotes, which it first began to issue in 1899, was the prevalent inclination of Egyptians to hoard gold rather than paper currency. As a result, even the Egyptian notables and dignitaries who did deal with the banks had little confidence in the credit system upon which banking operations

were founded.

It was essential, therefore, to find a banking vehicle that would gain the confidence of the urban *effendi* and small rural landowners, so as to capitalise on their savings. The solution came from India. In one of his yearly reports, Lord Cromer, the British High Commissioner, wrote that in that country, the Postal Savings Fund had, by the end of the 1901-1902 financial year attracted 866,693 subscribers whose total deposits were 106,821,233 rupees. The idea seemed well suited to Egypt, which had a postal system securely in place both in the cities and in the countryside and which was dealt with on a daily basis by those very sectors whose savings the government wanted to attract. An added advantage, in the eyes of law and order officials, was that money deposited in the postal fund would help reduce the numbers of burglaries in rural homes where homeowners had almost invariably hidden their money. It was thus that the Postal Savings Fund was introduced into Egypt precisely at the turn of the century, and *Al-Ahram* was on hand to witness its birth.

In February 1901, the Egyptian Postmaster General, Sabi Pasha, made the preliminary arrangements for the system. *Al-Ahram* of 23 February announces, "Sabir Pasha, the Egyptian postmaster general, was received by His Royal Highness the Khedive who expressed his pleasure at the new project to be instituted by the Postal Authority. The Khedive told him that he would be the first to deposit in the Postal Fund as an incentive to the people to participate in that beneficial activity. Thus the first sum to be deposited on 1 March and the first receipt to be issued on that date will be in the name of His Royal Highness the Khedive, who remains keen to lend his support and assistance to all new enterprises."

The Khedive's announcement was the starting signal for a concerted press campaign to boost the new drive. *Al-Ahram* participated wholeheartedly, with a series of articles of which the most important was the lead article of its 28 February edition of that year entitled "The Savings Bonds." The article opens with the exhortation of the Khedive to the people to participate in this beneficial enterprise. The new Postal Savings Fund, it argued, best put into effect that popular saying, "A white piastre will come in handy on a black day." It is the best solution for Egypt's youth "who, with an eye on a smiling future, are intent upon putting aside some savings from their vigorous

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A successful postal savings system in India inspired the establishment of Egypt's Postal Savings Fund in 1901. From modest beginnings, with deposits in the range of tens of thousands of pounds only, the fund has flourished greatly over the years and today it handles hundreds of millions of pounds. Egyptian Muslims initially were wary of the system, fearing that the interest it paid was a form of usury, forbidden by Islam. The government quickly revamped the fund law to allay those fears. Dr Yusan Labib Rizq tells the story from reports published by *Al-Ahram* between 1901 and 1904

and active youth for the days of rest and tranquility." Egyptians should look at the new system as a sort of school from which they will learn the art of economy so that they can become like the advanced peoples of the world, particularly the French who always represented to *Al-Ahram* the paragon of such virtues. "The closest testimony at hand to the advantages of the savings fund is the wealth accumulated by the French nation... That wealth is the fruit of economising. The women are sparing in their domestic spending and the men are sparing with their pocket money. Within a matter of years, even the poorest individual finds that the piastre or two he had put aside has multiplied to thousands."

On 1 March 1901 the Postal Savings Fund was inaugurated. It opened first in the post offices of Egypt's major cities, Cairo and Alexandria, the three cities on the Suez Canal, and the provincial capitals in the Delta, and Upper Egypt. In that day's edition, *Al-Ahram* published the terms for the transactions. "They will offer a 2.5 per cent interest rate; the first deposit should be no less than 200 millimes and each deposit afterwards no less than 50 millimes. No individual deposit should exceed LE50 a year and LE700 over several years. Depositors may have the fullest confidence in these conditions because the government guarantees the capital and its interest."

Quick on the trail of the spread of the Postal Savings Fund to Egypt's major cities and provincial capitals were *Al-Ahram*'s correspondents posted around the country. The Alexandria correspondent wrote, "Almost all of Egypt's miseries can be traced to one source — excessive spending and waste. We give scant attention to small sums and thus despair of becoming rich. We scoff at what we take to be paltry savings, unaware that after some

years they can increase to large amounts." *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Damanhur struck a more level-headed tone. The Postal Savings Fund, he said, provided a service to the poor, since the rich already had their banks. The system should expand further, he urged, particularly to the rural areas "where it will be of greater benefit than to the city people, who are less exposed to the risk of calamity and the vicissitudes of fate than the village people with their life of toil and hardship."

From the capital of Al-Buheira governorate, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent ridicules the fact that a city the size of Alexandria should have only one postal branch offering the new service. "What should the people in the neighbourhoods of Meke or Ramli do if they want to deposit the five piastres they saved when it would cost them half that amount just to get to the post office?"

On 22 April 1901, less than two months after the postal fund was introduced, *Al-Ahram* informs its readers that the deposits in the Cairo branch alone exceeded LE18,000. "These positive results are an encouraging sign of people's eagerness to save." Indeed, so encouraging were the results, that it promised "to publish a weekly report on the transactions, a service newspapers should perform for their readers free of charge as an incentive toward this worthy investment, for if beneficial deeds are not publicised they are forgotten."

Al-Ahram remained true to its promise to publish weekly reports on the transactions, but it did little in the way of analysis. For this we turn to one of Lord Cromer's secret reports, in which he said that during its first three years, the postal fund had not attracted sufficient public participation. During this rather lengthy initial phase, only 20,193 people had deposited, a figure far less than predicted.

By the end of 1901, some 44 postal sav-

ings bond branches had been opened. At the same time, a report showed an increase for that period in the amount of currency in circulation, with imports of currency totalling LE12,416,600 gold pounds. Hopes that portions of this sum might be translated into savings investments were dashed. Cromer was in for further disappointment when he learned that most of the deposits were foreigners, notably Italians and Greeks, and, of the Egyptian population, most were Christians. He concluded that at least part of the aversion to the new system had its roots in religious principles. Indeed, he had already heard accusations that the fund was a form of usury and that some Muslims had only deposited their savings on the condition that they receive no interest on them.

Towards the end of 1903, the issue was put under deliberation in the hopes that the results would lead to a royal edict that would dispel the qualms over the nature of the interest derived from this form of investment. The subject, like so many others that touched on sensitive local interests, was bound to provoke confrontation between Abdin Palace and the high commissioner's office. The Khedive was particularly keen to keep the British from meddling in religious matters, while Lord Cromer had a personal interest in the success of the postal fund from the outset. The court official Ahmed Shafiq Pasha recalls the battle between Cairo's two power centres in his memoirs.

The beginning, he recalls, was when, at Lord Cromer's prompting, the Council of Ministers drafted a new, broader bill of law for the project that would avert some of the criticism levelled against it. Abbas, presiding over one of the Council's sessions, was surprised to be presented with this bill. He objected that it still did not comply with *sharia* constraints because it still contained the word "interest," the project's major stumbling block. Cromer re-asserted the Khedive's interference, while the Khedive for his part supported the views of the *ulama* (religious scholars). It was then decided to convoke a panel of *ulama*, which eventually drafted a proposal for a new project. The most significant portion of their proposal was its Article 1 which aimed to circumvent the religious obstacle.

The article was published in full in *Al-Ahram*'s edition of 15 February 1904. In essence, it contained three major stipulations: firstly, that the director of the postal fund used "the money deposited with him in those matters that are permitted by Islamic law and that are entirely free of any

taint whatsoever of usury;" secondly, that the depositor accept that his money be amalgamated with the money of other depositors; and, thirdly, that he agree "to share with the owners of the other sums deposited in the profits commensurate to the amount deposited."

Cromer confesses that the Khedive, by emphasising the religious aspect of the issue, had succeeded in asserting his personal authority over the project.

Nevertheless, there were aspects on which Abdin Palace and the high commissioner's office agreed. One was "not to disclose any information on the sums deposited to unauthorised parties." The information would be made available to the judicial authorities upon presentation of the appropriate affidavits; however these authorities would not have the right to freeze deposits.

Before the project could be passed into law, Cromer writes that he had to obtain the approval of the eleven countries which enjoyed privileges under the capitulation system in Egypt, delaying the implementation of the new system until mid-March of that year. The last to give its approval was Russia.

When the new system was implemented, instructions were issued to postal employees not to pressure the public into subscribing under the new system for fear that that would have adverse effects. At the same time, the postal authority introduced a system of booklets in which people could affix five piastre stamps. When the booklet was complete (10 stamps), they could deposit it with the Postal Saving Fund.

Apparently, the new system quickly bore fruit. In his yearly report of 1904, Cromer notes that the number of depositors increased from its previous level of approximately 20,000 to 29,000 and that the value of deposits increased during the same period from LE 131,000 to LE 180,000. The British high commissioner felt that these were encouraging signs. His optimism was well placed. The new postal savings fund system overcame the difficulties of its first three years of existence and set a tradition of caring for the average Egyptian family. Soon it became an established custom for a father to open up a postal savings booklet for every newborn child.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Reda El-Wakil:



Atmosphere man

He's like a bright bead, its light reflected from a pearl. Do men do this? Is it on the agenda? Is it practical, quite decent?



photo: Sherif Saad

He's a male, a father, a husband and so on and on into the endless banalities of ordinary life. But a bright bead? Should one speak of such things about a family man?

Well, at least some human beings have atmosphere; they produce it like a scent around themselves. It's an atmosphere that fails to win over portrait painters and photographers — psychologists pick it out better. It cannot be bought or acquired, and has nothing to do with being beautiful or famous. Stars often fall as flat as old omelettes — lights yes, but no atmosphere.

Reda El-Wakil has this indescribable something. There are dark effulgences emanating from human beings that can be felt anywhere. In the London or New York metro there are people, sitting down in front of one, who terrify — will they go quietly or pull a gun on the lot of us, as we pretend to mind our own business? El-Wakil is not a metro terrorist but might play one in an opera, wants to — to sing Boito's *Meistersinger*, the arch-fiend.

The voice belongs completely with the physical phenomenon. It glows in the dark like the glint of rich silver paper catching the light — not quite of the earth. He is a visitor, not staying. This is no trouble to anyone listening to him in an opera house. His voice does not bray like a tenor; it suffuses, envelopes, easy, plays no tricks. That is the strength of the bass voice. It's for real. "The dark does exist, apparently, some people are afraid of it, have night terrors". He is a day-dark night-light in the gloaming, out where the stars don't go.

A voice is a fascination. Like it or not, no one makes them — voices go their own way. That's about it. From Billy Holiday to Schwarzkopf, it's

the same mystery. Like the atmosphere, the only true voices belong to no one but space. El-Wakil seems to have everything: a voice, height (he's a tall, tall man), a mind which rests on things, and he can act. But does he need to? He has this atmospheric space around him which gives him physical handsomeness and harmony. But the particular messages of the spaces around him are disquieting. He's like the grand Cocteau actor, whom he resembles almost exactly: Jacques Pitoëff — the Oedipus and Henrico Quatro of the spoken theatre.

El-Wakil faces up to evil. It is like the pulp magazine kiosk. It is all there in the irresistible trashy splendour. Buy it glossy and weekly, because the trash is gorgeously indispensable, like a perfume. But El-Wakil is no ordinary perfume. He's the light from some place outside which moves in to cast a brief glow over the trash. You can't ask for more in 1996. *Meistersinger* would laugh. El-Wakil says a voice is fire, but not the owner whom it haunts.

He exudes this sort of freedom himself, and, far Cairo, he manages to enjoy the freedom of being unhurried. Tall people seldom hurry. They never push nor insist. They are there from childhood and have to be circumvented like naga bringing in a transatlantic liner to berth. The lofty ones are mostly kind. He bends over and forward with solicitude and straightens up into a tower of silence if crossed.

Life, now, makes little allowance for anything at all, let alone tall people. But atmosphere in a person you seldom spot. He and his voice can cleave through the rough waters.

He was born in Cairo, Heliopolis, in 1956. Getting back onto the life-line with dates and details is hard going after the pleasures of the floating

life of opera singers. As types they seem to have their own special way with the passing of time. El-Wakil had a rather peaceful young life. He avoids talking about himself as a child. He was happy. He has a brother, Hassan, who is a well-known percussionist. His father, Mahmoud Fawzi El-Wakil, was in the army and had a distinguished career. His mother agreed to his becoming a singer after it was found he possessed a high soprano voice. Both parents were helpful and no opposition ever arose.

At 16 he entered the prep school for the conservatoire, where he remained for four years. At twenty he sang the role of Osmine, the lecherous, devious but likable bass anti-hero of the opera. He was a thin, tall young man whose voice in these days just kept going down, and down and down into basso profundo depths. The dean of the conservatoire then was Samha El-Khouli, whom El-Wakil reveres as the personal force whose magnetism and imagination and practicality supported him on his career. She is one to do nothing by halves and so his beginnings were dramatic and speedy. His Cairo teachers were Mmes Rathe and Maklor. Later, in Spain, Imgard Seefried, the great singer from the Vienna Staats Oper, assisted him tremendously. In London he worked with Noelle Barker and in Paris with Caroline Dumas and Michel Roux.

From 1992 he began to collect his degrees and felicitations as well as laurels from the various competitions he attended in Europe. These are important distinctions, awards for an artist just beginning in the wide-open opera world. For El-Wakil, they came thick and fast. From Paris at the Ecole Normale, from Toulouse and Marseilles — first prizes. Another first: the Placido Domingo opera prize awarded by the Opera de la Bastille, Paris. Then finally in 1994, once again at the Ecole Normale, he was given, unanimously from an entire jury, first prize with Special Men-

tion. During this wandering life he appeared at the Warsaw Opera House in the three Mozart-DePonte operas *Don Giovanni*, *Nazze di Figaro* and *Costi Fan Tutti*. At the Bastille Opera, he sang bass role in *Ballo in Maschera*, and at the festivals of Avignon and Nîmes, bass again. In March this year he did Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* at the Opera Comique, Paris. Later, concerts with the Orchestre d'Ile de France and the Berlin Philharmonic in the 9th Symphony of Beethoven. In 1997 he goes to Toulouse in Puccini and Verdi.

These opera houses use the bass baritone voice in the small range of roles they provide for this species. Seldom is there a basso hero or alluring villain. They are confined to fathers, beggars, minor criminals; the tenor walks away with the big killer roles. In the bad old days of the New York Opera, the high-voiced stars colliding in the sky, it used to be said as a bass, keep quiet, keep friendly — and sing like hell. So-bass baritones can go on singing for ever and they do. And like El-Wakil, they become, quite quietly, the backbone of the biggest opera houses in the world.

Don Giovanni at the Cairo Opera House with El-Wakil in the title a few years ago. The show itself caused a fuss — Arabic words and off-centre production, and he as a laconic, almost street-wise Egyptian. He gave a splendid relaxed performance. In one show — the final dress rehearsal — he wore a Humphrey Bogart black fedora hat. In a black floppy suit he was completely contemporary, no retro sex show, but a cool creature with a smooth gift of words.

He moved like a dancer — too tall for Don Giovanni, who's usually a raunchy, short man. El-Wakil was sleek as an eel, a night-time vulture. He showed in this opera what atmosphere was about — almost nothing. You can name it and use it in the theatre; it poses all the questions but answers nothing. He was not *fin de siècle*. How can the young be that, when the century has gone past them? The atmospherics will inherit music for their own special use. This production with El-Wakil threw away the book and almost the lights, since it was done as a winter's tale.

Bass voices do have a wintry tinge. Schubert's *Winterreise* suits them — not the songs of summer.

They belong in the shadows, yet are never tearful or lachrymose. We need the basses; they keep us warm and if they have the power can envelop us for life — like Wotan. El-Wakil is a bass baritone and a basso cantante (Mozart), a bass of middle range (Verdi) and the basso profundo. Basses seem to deliver the dead bodies the high voices have either strangled or stabbed. They are often fun. The bass baritone is the voice who gets through all the jumps and jogs to the finish. This is the area through which El-Wakil operates. He can move either way — up or down.

There is one particular role perfectly suited to El-Wakil: Blue Beard in Bartok's one-act two-person opera *Blue Beard's Castle*. Bartok, Hungarian; that language — why not in Arabic? So suitable for a mystical rhetorical libretto, with none of Aunt Leila's Italian operatic snobbery. It is his role. The six-foot-plus physique, the strange unburied presence, the shadow of blood and the feel of an ancient magnificence collapsing into darkness of this man fit the part.

No one stands in queues for basses, but they provide the structure for which the opera is formed. You won't find El-Wakil in the streets of Cairo, but he has his own poetry and it comes from the streets. It is the nameless threat.

So much for the artist. The man in this case, like the great actor he resembles in appearance, erases himself behind a mask of water and air.

There he is, over there at the Chinese take-away. There he is not. He dissolves himself before your eyes. Only the voice stays around. These people must be alarming to be with. He has a wife, two children and, by nature, is totally Egyptian. Kindly to talk to and solicitous. High-mannered and charming. The talk goes on. He is in the same circle of you, the interrogator, but the smile is cleared away like finger-prints on glass. The height seems to increase. He's 36, he says — maybe 2,036. This emblematic tapestry of a man is moving into another dimension where the colours on the wall are swaying. And he's gone through the wall.

Profile by David Blake

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